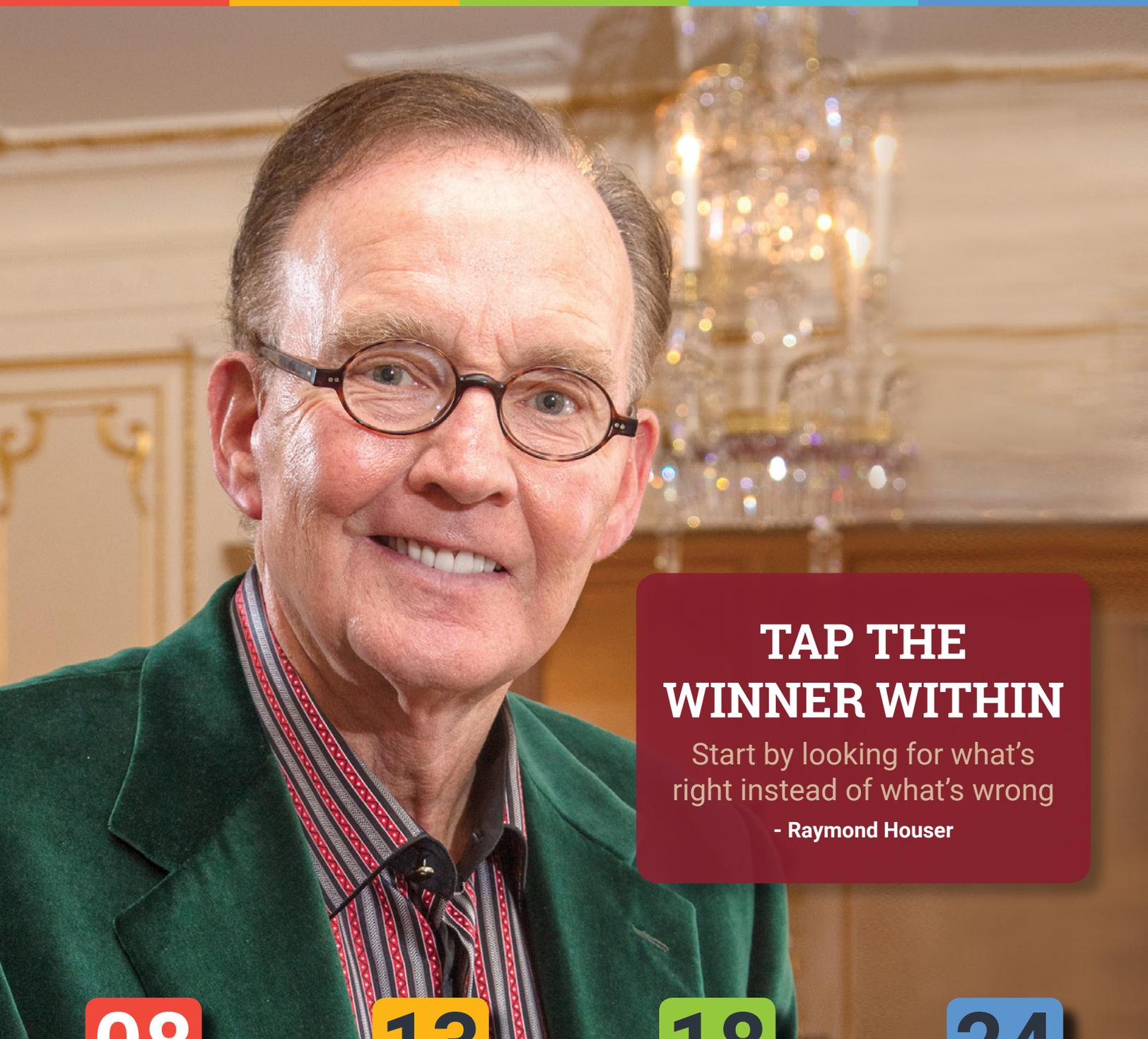


Personal

Excellence



TAP THE WINNER WITHIN

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- Greg Zlevor



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EDITOR'S NOTE

A goal without a plan is just a wish. How many of you have set clear goals for the life ahead? The reason people experience disappointment is not because they've failed at some endeavor, but because they've never formulated clear goals for themselves. They turn to quick fixes, and while they may see some improvement, the results usually don't last and they end up back where they started.

You can achieve excellence once you realize what is holding you back. You just need to start by looking for what's right instead of what's wrong. Read Raymond Houser's article, **Tap The Winner Within**, for more insights on how to keep yourself grounded when it feels like the floor has dropped out from under you.

In our life, we are constantly exposed to situations we cannot control, handle or even influence. The easiest way is always that "the others" change or do things differently. The bad news is: you cannot change others, you can only change your own point of view. Read Davis Kubers' article, **How**

To Find More Joy In Your Work, to know more about two efficient and powerful tools you can use every day to start with.

Are you conscious of how your tone of voice is conveying your message? It is far more important in communication than most people realize. People may appear to be listening to your words, but they are unconsciously reacting to your tone and their response will be a result of this interplay. What can you practice right now to set things right? Read Greg Zlevor's article, **It's Not What You Say, It's How You Say It**, for the answer.

In a world of rapidly changing technologies, job markets, and economic unpredictability, finding a career you love over the long term may seem a progressively challenging endeavour. Read Norma Forastiere's article, **Finding A Career You Love**, for some amazing tips.

If knowledge was the only key to success, we would all be rich, thin, and happy. Unfortunately, success requires consistent action, and any time we can make a commitment once and generate action far into the future, we are virtually guaranteeing our success. Read Jim Stovall's article, **Autopilot Of Success**, for more insights.

Apart from these articles, we also have a bunch of other articles that can inspire you throughout your journey and help you become better individuals. We hope you enjoy reading all the articles and get back to us with your thoughts and comments.

Cheers!

Have a say?
Write to the Editor.



Debbie McGrath
Publisher, HR.com



Babitha Balakrishnan
Editor, Personal Excellence

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Personal Excellence (ISSN 8756-2308) is published monthly by HR.com Limited, 56 Malone Road, Jacksons Point, Ontario L0E 1L0. **Internet Address:** www.hr.com

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Tap The Winner Within

Start by looking for what's right instead of what's wrong

By Raymond Houser

You wouldn't think of starting out on a long journey without a map to get you from where you are to your destination. Yet how many people go through life without a clear destination, much less a roadmap for getting there?

The reason people experience disappointment is not because they've failed at some endeavor, but because they've never formulated clear goals for themselves. They turn to quick fixes, and while they may see some improvement, the results usually don't last and they end up back where they started.



You can achieve excellence once you realize what is holding you back.

Throughout my career, I've observed how people are being held back by their own lack of belief in themselves and their own abilities. In doing so, they deprive themselves as well as friends, family and society of their potential accomplishments.

From selling books door to door, to buying and selling real estate, to managing futures in the financial markets, I've observed all kinds of people with one connecting trait: the ones who did not succeed gave up when things got tough. And times do get tough, which is why a map of instruction on how to survive and thrive is so important.

Many people are hard-pressed to define why they have chosen a particular job or career. They exist in a state of "domestic entrapment", performing jobs in order to make ends meet rather than out of any deep conviction. As a result, they pursue jobs or careers that don't take advantage of their true talents, and are content to fritter

away their productive years in meaningless occupations.

Ask yourself:

- Are you choosing a job for the wrong reasons?
- Do you know what the fundamentals of the job are?
- Are you being influenced by unqualified sources (people who don't know what they are talking about?)
- Is risk-taking too scary and therefore you lean toward a "safe" job?
- Are unexpected financial responsibilities trapping you to settle for what you don't want but think you need?

Understanding problems and situations you are going to face are crucial before making a decision about a career. Before considering a career, you should interview professionals in the field you want to pursue and ask them about the most discouraging times that they've had to override and conquer, and what motivated them to go into this field.

Taking the time and effort to do this may force you to ask yourself some tough questions:

- Do I really feel like taking on this area of study?
- Is it something that I have an affinity for?
- Could I handle rejection if I didn't succeed at first?
- Is someone pressing me to study a subject that holds little interest for me?
- Do I see myself as a fit for this career from what I know now?

The most crucial thing is to have a plan. If you don't have a plan but you have a good tactic, you must pursue it and not just wander aimlessly.

I don't think that my time after high school could have been spent better than going to college. Looking back at my circumstances, although I was not pursuing a specific degree with a suitable profession in mind, going to college gave me an opportunity to grow as an individual.

Nevertheless, being in an environment that was full of possibilities gave me an open mind to see the merit behind the book-selling opportunity once it was presented. Had I been spending my life in a noncommittal, low-productive lifestyle, with no particular direction in mind, I would not have been able to recognize the challenge and opportunity once it was offered.

So many people would be pursuing their life-long dream if they believed that the greatest security is within him or her and not the job, the company, or the government. We make our own

security in life. More than ever, this is a lesson that everybody needs to embrace.

When you realize that you are the engine of your dreams, the excitement of what is possible will grab you. And when it does, anything is possible and the rewards can be enormous.

Like every other skill, developing a positive self-image requires practice. Write down your goals, and act as though you have already achieved them. Develop the habit to record a success when it happens. Make other people feel important (at least two people a day and write down their names if you can).

Write down all the things you are doing well and those that are not going so well. Accentuate the positive.

One of the most painful feelings we can experience is rejection. There are few experiences that are more emotionally devastating.

I learned this first-hand while selling books door to door. I had doors slammed in my face so loud the windows rattled. One time a guy grabbed me by the arm, escorted me out to the edge of his lawn and threatened, "Don't you ever come back here again."

I learned that for every sale, there might be dozens of rejections. Lots of times I knew that as hard as I tried, that sale was just not going to happen, and there I was, back out on the hot sidewalk with many more doors to knock on.

But I pressed on. Whatever success I've known in life is not because I'm a genius. It's because I wouldn't quit.

When rejection hits, you face a choice: either you can beat yourself up and erode your self-esteem, or you can use the rejection as a learning experience and try to avoid repeating the mistake. Seek new ways to do things; think in different ways. That is called growth.

There is plenty of blame to go around, but to move forward, it is necessary to face your errors and admit them. Excuses may seem like a convenient way out of an uncomfortable situation, but they do nothing to create a long-term solution.

Everyone at some point in their lives has questioned their self-worth. The difference is that successful people know how to interpret their negative feelings and place them into the proper context. Successful people are interested in results, so they face their fears and act.

In contrast, people who allow their fears to dictate their actions are content to just get by. At some point, they come to grips with the fundamental truth that happiness comes from enriching the lives of others, whether through ideas, products or services.

People who strive for excellence know that they won't always succeed, but are willing to take on the challenge. These people know there will be times of

rejection; indeed, at times they wish they had never taken on that challenge. But through perseverance, they will experience the rewards that come with true accomplishments.

When I was selling books door-to-door did I enjoy having doors slammed in my face, working 80 hours a week? No, I did not, but I did enjoy going back to Nashville and receiving my paycheck, which, at the time, was more money than I had ever seen in my life. It was enough money to pay the following year's tuition at Auburn University with some left over. This motivated me to continue to sell books each summer while in college. At that point (1969), I possessed \$25,000 in my savings (equivalent to over \$170,000 in 2017) and this accomplishment, in turn, motivated me to pursue other challenges. How could it not? This was a strong financial start and foundation for a college graduate.

When things go wrong, it's very easy to fall back into negativity about yourself and your aims. It's not always easy to propel yourself forward again. The first step is to recall your attributes. Don't be shy. You are taking honest stock of yourself. List them in order of occurrence in your past. Look at the things you have done well and believe in them.

There are ways to keep yourself grounded when it feels like the floor has dropped out from under you.

Look at the following list and check off the descriptions that apply to you. If your particular plusses are not on the list, feel free to add them. I am:

- Dynamic
- Dependable
- Honest
- Considerate
- Enthusiastic
- Compassionate
- Positive
- Dedicated
- Hardworking
- A believer in what I do
- Determined
- An excellent listener
- Friendly
- Great at what I do

My guess is that you checked off more than one category. If you are a generally positive and friendly person, then setbacks are not going to change your outlook for long. If you are enthusiastic and determined, you won't stop until you achieve more successes. If you are a dedicated hard worker, you are not likely to stop because you want results.

I will leave you with the following quotation from Pastor Charles Swindoll about the power to choose when dealing with adversity: "Attitude, to me, is more important than facts. It is more important than the past, than education, than money, than circumstances, than failures, than successes, than what other people think or say or do. It is more important than appearances, giftedness or skills ... I am convinced that life is 10% what happens to me and 90% how I

react to it. And so it is with you ... we are in charge of our attitudes. "



Raymond Houser is the author of **THE WINNING ADVANTAGE: Tap Into Your Richest Resources**. He started earning money by selling pecans when he was six years-old. By the time he was 12, he had a paper route in addition to working in grocery stores and a bowling alley. When his dream of becoming a major league baseball catcher ended, he knew he had to focus on other goals. And that is what he did, challenging himself to overcome shyness and knock on doors until he became the highest-grossing divisional book salesman of his time for the Southwestern Company. After that he started, developed, and eventually sold, his own book company. His career had its ups and downs, including a bankruptcy. Yet, despite setbacks, he never gave up. Starting a new career in his 40s, he was hired at Merrill Lynch where he became a successful money manager who earned accolades—and substantial income for himself and his clients—through trust in himself and innovation. In time, he started, developed, and eventually sold, another company. Today he is a sought-after speaker who offers his experience and perspective on managing a career and, most of all, a life.



▶ Would you like to comment?

Daring To Be Different Is The Key

Change is inevitable, except from a vending machine



By **Bill Blades**

"Remember always that you not only have the right to be an individual, you have an obligation to be one." **Eleanor Roosevelt**

How many salespeople do you know who acted on just 6 new skills this past year?

Many get stuck in a comfort zone achieving some success

and they then become content and stop growing. But, success and peak performance are not the same things. In this writing, I'll share some ideas which you might think, "That's not me" or they might even frighten you. Even if you're afraid of change, try new things on a regular basis and you'll be delighted to find what was once scary becomes a great

part of your everyday success. Change is inevitable, except from a vending machine.

Start by being weird and fun. I've found, over the decades, that being "out there" a bit is extremely effective for getting appointments, developing relationships and obtaining a lot of business. Don't be afraid



of displaying a quirkier side as it will differentiate you from hundreds of other Salespeople who come off as robots. Almost everyone, even including some accountants, enjoys being with someone who is fun to be with and interesting. Every person and corporation goes through good and bad times but their doors fly open to gravitate to those who bring a sense of humor, creativity and value-add propositions. It is a "small number club" you can join.

Here are some things I have personally done and currently do for clients for **creativity**.

- I give away golf gloves with my logo instead of golf balls. Balls are lost and cut. Gloves stare at them on every shot.
- I don't ask for an 8:00 am appointment. I ask for 8:03 am followed by a confirming note that states, "I'll arrive at 7:59 am for my 8:03 am". It works every time. They are almost always in the lobby for two

reasons: 1) to see what time I arrive and 2) to meet a weirdo.

- I use postage stamps with my photo.
- Instead of a lunch at a restaurant, I arrange for a gourmet caterer to serve it at the client's desk. Invite all decision-makers. They love watching the presentation.
- Ten-minute chair massages for a small group works well. Who doesn't have stress?
- I don't send flowers. I send small cactus as I'll then be there forever.
- I don't just get a group out for a ball game. All of us meet at a great restaurant followed by a rental van to drop all of us at the ballpark entrance so clients didn't have to walk from a distant lot. I have a Salesperson at our seating area hand out programs I've signed with a personal note. A Salesperson goes to get the van again in the 7th inning to avoid clients from walking to the parking lot. The very

first time I did this I landed a Fortune 100 client that day. As an added touch, we get a retired player to appear and sign balls while I sign books, provide complimentary consulting and set up appointments for the next few days for my client and me. The table has been set for success.

- I like to send post cards, from international travels, to someone I've never met. Signed, "I'm excited about seeing you, Bill." It drives them nuts... "Who is Bill?" They don't throw it away until I call. The Assistant then asks, "May I tell him who is calling?" "Yes, this is Bill." Assistant: "Who are you? It's been driving us nuts!" Appointments are easy.
- I had a client whose logo was a General from the Civil War. I had a pottery maker prepare several liquor decanters painted to match the General. Beat the heck out of a generic gift they would have forgotten about...quickly.
- I was meeting with two clients, and they both loved my Italian dress shirt I was wearing. Me: "What size are you?" And "Sorry, if it was your sizes I'd take it off and give it to one of you." I called my shirt vendor and ordered two monogrammed shirts in their sizes. They both wore them on my next visit(s).
- I've arranged for a portable car wash firm to pull into the client's parking lot and wash all decision-makers cars. I've arranged for shoe shine stands brought in. Two spectacles.

- Since I speak for meetings, I have “Bill Blades for Speaker” bumper stickers which I put on airplane walls and on the back of flight attendants. Too weird? I’ve landed clients that way.
- Even my roller bag reads, “Got Sales?” (like “Got Milk?”) along with my website. Views? Maybe 100,000+.

I’ll stop on creativity ideas because I know what some logical salespeople are thinking. But, I’ll add that if salespeople fought sin as hard as they fight creativity and humor, this would be a more wonderful place for a lot of people.

Let’s move on to **extra-extra value-add propositions**. I gave my first speech at One Times Square at the age of 22. I then gave my first convention speech, for my industry, at 24 years of age. It progressed to me speaking over 25 times annually for our industry meetings and for potential clients. I landed many Fortune 5000 clients by speaking on sales and leadership issues versus trying to sell them something.

One CEO, during the break, was talking to his executive staff. After all of us got back to the meeting room, he asked if he could speak. In front of his group, he said, “I invested over \$1 million in educating this group last year and we all just agreed that we received more usable ideas in 90 minutes then all of last year. I have to ask, what do you want in return?” I said, “just your X and Y business (their two largest items we were

already approved with) and I’d like to leave here with our first order today.” He asked, “what time is your flight?” After I told him the time, he replied, “let’s leave here at 1:00 pm to go to the office and get it done.” It was about value.

Later, after I began speaking and consulting as a profession, I asked my clients to arrange for me to speak for their largest, potential clients. Every time, we gained an abundance of business. Why? We provided valuable value-added services by giving them ideas on how to grow their people and their business. Their current vendor became irrelevant as they were just taking orders.

Often, I get my clients to arrange for me to meet with CEOs of their potential clients. The CEO has been encouraged to visit my site and to have some challenges to share with me. I open the meeting by signing one of my books which sets up a good atmosphere. Sometimes I go alone and sometimes with my client’s Salesperson, depending on the circumstances and the client’s wishes. This beats a routine call any day. And, I always ask for business as we just earned it. Closing ratio? About 95%.

[Scott Romeo](#) wrote, “A sale is an outcome. It is the result of careful analysis of your potential clients and your own strategy for obtaining clients. Stop concentrating on the sale or the final outcome and start focusing on the strategies that can result in a sale.” That’s

why the value-added services I mentioned above are not for every CEO. They are for select, targeted and progressive firms we want a relationship with. And, with those that prefer vendors who are fun, creative and value oriented – whether they realize it or not.

Otherwise, it’s tough to just try to sell stuff to anybody. Joy and value win hands down almost every time. Out are the ways of selling from long ago. In are the opportunities to be “out there” and more successful.

“Courage doesn’t always roar. Sometimes courage is the little voice at the end of the day saying, ‘I will try again tomorrow’.” **Mary Anne Radmacher – American Author**



Bill Blades, CMC, CPSP, is a speaker and consultant specializing in sales and leadership.



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Finding A Career You Love

| 5 tips to follow

 By **Norma Forastiere**

In a world of rapidly changing technologies, job markets, and economic unpredictability, finding a career you love over the long term may seem a progressively challenging endeavor. According to [one report](#) published by Dell Technologies, 85% of jobs that will exist in 2030 has not been invented yet, while other research from the [US Bureau of Labor Statistics](#) indicates there are common jobs now that may be virtually non-existent in 20 years' time.

Generating a working life that continually engages and inspires you doesn't have to be difficult and, when approached from an open and innovative perspective, can be an ongoing catalyst for growth, accomplishment, and personal creativity.

Whether you are looking for a change in trajectory or starting your journey in the world of business, here are 5 tips to ensure that you find, and keep choosing, a career that truly works for you:

1. Learn From Everyone, but Choose for You

Don't follow or replicate another person's model for success. Many who have done well in business will try to create a structure or formula for others to follow to gain a similar outcome, but it rarely works for another person to the same degree. Every person is unique, and your career will thrive not by fitting in, but by following your own points of difference. This doesn't mean you should exclude anyone or anything: educate yourself, learn and gain inspiration from others. Ask lots of questions and be open to receiving information, advice, and knowledge—many things

and people will contribute to you if you are willing to ask and seek them out. But when it comes to the choices you make in regard to your career, don't look to external people or sources to make decisions for you. Trust you first and foremost and choose for you—even if it's not the most common or popular choice according to others.

2. Look at What Comes Easily to You that You Think Anyone Can Do

We are taught to believe that whatever is most difficult for us to accomplish or attain in life usually has the greatest value. However, when it comes to identifying your own skills and talents, the opposite tends to be true: when it is easy for you, it is most likely where your greatest (and most valuable) capacities lie.

Take a closer look at your current interests and abilities: what comes so easily to you that you believe it isn't valuable or you assume anyone can do it? Are you good with numbers or coordinating social events and parties? Do you excel at helping friends re-organize their cupboards and shelves? Do you have an affinity with plants or animals, or easily establish rapport with others in social situations? Don't make the mistake of undervaluing any aspect of you. Instead, look to your interests and natural capacities as a guide for where you could go in your career.

3. What is Fun for You?

If you desire your career to have longevity, you have to ultimately be doing it for the joy. While money (or lack of it) can create short-term motivation, it is not sustainable or fulfilling in the long term.

What is really fun for you, that brings you joy? Try to think in wider terms with this question. For example, you may love playing baseball, but what is it about the sport that you like? Is it being outdoors and taking on physical challenges? Is it playing with a team? Is it game-strategy or competitive events? Do the same when considering your career: rather than trying to create a picture in your mind of the perfect job, think about the broader elements: what kind of environment would you like to work in—an office, from home, a mixture of both? What kind of work culture? Would travel be included and if so, how much? What kind of people do you want to work with? How much money would be fun for you to make per year?



4. Don't Limit Yourself Based on Your Education, Experience or Anything Else

As you consider these questions in the pursuit of a satisfying career, make sure that you are not unconsciously limiting yourself from any options based on assumptions or beliefs about your current education or experience. There are many [highly successful people](#) who did not complete a college education or necessarily even know much about their chosen field before they began. Ask yourself, "If I truly had no limits on what I could create as a career, what would I choose?" and "What one step could I take today towards making that a reality in the future?" Then, take action.

5. Don't Be Afraid of Mis-steps or Failures

When you worry about making the "right" career choices, wait for the perfect opportunities, or try to

have it all figured out before getting started, you slow yourself down. Finding a career you love will happen faster if you just get out into the world, now. Meet people and make connections. Ask lots of questions. Go beyond your comfort zone. Don't give up. With any setback, rather than getting discouraged, ask, "What else is possible?"

Failure, rejection, and deviations along your path are not wrong. In fact, if you get into the habit of asking yourself, "What's right about this?" in the face of any seemingly negative outcome, you will begin to see how it could actually benefit you—failures are often catalysts for the greatest insights, innovations and growth.

The most important thing to remember as you embark on your own path in the business world is that you always have another choice. If something isn't working for you, you can choose again. Be proactive, curious and endlessly open-minded in your perspective. Trust yourself. Put your attention on what is easy and fun for you and you will be well on your way to generating a career path that you not only love, but will lead you in surprising, and rewarding directions.



Norma Forastiere is a business mentor, natural therapist and certified facilitator of several [Access Consciousness®](#) special programs, including [Being You](#), Right Voice for You, Joy of Business, Being You, and Access Bars®. A *self-proclaimed* seeker, Norma began practicing mediation at an early age and then went on to study metaphysics and several energy healing and natural therapy modalities. A native Portuguese speaker with a proficiency in English and Spanish, Norma offers workshops and consultations for those willing to explore greater possibilities in life, communication and business.



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How To Find More Joy In Your Work

Two powerful tools you can use every day



By David Kubes

The answer to this question is easy – you can't. Joy isn't something you can find or something that someone else can provide. Joy is something you have to be. So, let us talk about how to "be" more joy in your work.

Happiness is a choice; being joyful is a choice, and having more

joy at work is something you need to choose. Does this sound too simple?

In our life, we are constantly exposed to situations we cannot control, handle or even influence. The easiest way is always that "the others" change or do things differently. The bad news is: you

cannot change others, you can only change your own point of view. Let me share two efficient and powerful tools you can use every day to start with.

1. Interesting Point of View

Anger, frustration, disappointment and unhappiness have one

source in common: your point of view. If everything that happens to you during the day was just an interesting point of view – would you be angry or unhappy? If everything someone else tells you, was just a piece of neutral information, would you be disappointed? The way you receive the information and the judgment you add to it defines your state of being. It is your choice in which drawer you put it. I prefer putting it all into the “neutral” one, the “interesting point of view” drawer.

This is why happiness is a choice; you can decide how to handle all these situations. You decide the charge you put on every comment someone else makes. You are in charge of your life.

An easy way to start practicing this tool is the “interesting point of view – toll”: Since you cannot change the way others interact with you, you can only start with you. Whenever someone says or does something, that would normally offend you or make you feel angry or sad, say “interesting point of view that this person has this point of view” to yourself. Going into the state of “interesting point of view” immediately neutralizes emotions and allows you to deal with the situation in a professional way rather than reacting to an attack.

2. Less Conclusions - More Questions

Another great tool to experience more joy in your work is taking out the significance of everything

that “happens”. First of all, nothing is as significant and important as it seems to be at first sight. Secondly, there is always a solution, no matter how complicated a situation may appear.

An ideal tool to have more ease with critical or difficult situations is asking “open” questions. Instead of analyzing the “why” or looking for the “culpable”, move on and find a solution. An open question is a question with no answer, a question where you do not look for a specific answer or solution to a specific problem. And that’s the essential part when you resolve a problem: Do not look for the answer. Looking for an answer is always a limitation as you exclude those possibilities you have not even considered. In open question, on the other hand, is an activation of your creativity and curiosity. “What else is possible here?”, or “What would it take to change this situation with ease?” are my favorite examples. The more general an open question is formulated, the better it works. It allows you to expand and invite different points of view and new ideas to be added. This tool is most effective when you are working in a team. It opens doors to new possibilities you have not considered yet and allows everyone involved to add creativity into the project.

Applying these tools to your business or work will make you independent of the actions and behavior of others and allow you to develop a state of being

that always includes joy and happiness. You will also develop a different approach to dealing with problems and difficult situations, an approach that focuses on solutions. A powerful combination that will not only bring more joy to your work, it will also increase your business.



David Kubes is an international lawyer specializing in aviation law, finance and project management. In 2006, he opened his own boutique law firm Kubes Passeyrer Attorneys at Law. A savvy entrepreneur, he owns several companies including an import-export company in Cuba, an Art Gallery in Vienna and his own real estate development company in Vienna. He is a European-licensed coach and alternative dispute resolution practitioner and heads an international coaching and consulting company. He is a certified facilitator of several [Access Consciousness®](#) special programs, including Wealth Creators Anonymous.

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Happier, Healthier And Younger In Retirement

Here is the formula for success and happiness

By **Fred Sievert**

We all understand and appreciate the need for sound financial planning during the years preceding retirement. Who among us hasn't gone online to calculate our retirement "nest-egg" needs and then panicked because accumulating that much wealth seemed inconceivable; especially if we started the process at age 55 or later?

While it's critically important to solicit financial planning advice from professionals and then to demonstrate strong personal discipline in executing the plan, there is another aspect to your retirement plans that are equally important. My own retirement has proven to be a magnificent experience of feeling happier, healthier and younger than I've felt in decades. How did I plan for that and how can you plan too?

While being prepared financially for a secure retirement certainly contributes enormously to our happiness, I have found it even more important to attend to all of the other nonfinancial aspects of post-career lifestyle and plans.

Caught up in the rigors of pursuing a career, many of us dream of a time in retirement when we can relax, pursue leisurely activities, travel more often, and hence we believe, enjoy life more fully. I remember when I was climbing the corporate ladder at New York Life and working 14 or more hours per day (with little reprieve on Saturday or Sunday). A half-hour with family was rare but wonderful and even running



errands for an hour or two on a Saturday morning was a welcomed escape from the toil and intensity of the job. How wonderful it was to fantasize about the days when I would finally get some well-deserved rest and relief from that hectic pace.

However, like many people, since embarking on the very real retirement voyage, I have discovered that the formula for success and happiness has little to do with how much we relax, rest and enjoy leisurely

activities. A happy retirement comes from continuing to live a life of consequence and impact. In fact, if you're like me, when the time comes, you will quickly stop describing yourself as "retired" and instead talk about how engaged and energized you are in the pursuit of your most important lifelong passions. The adjective "retired" is a real misnomer for me and for thousands like me.

Whether you're in your 60s, 50s or even 40s, let me offer some advice on how to begin to explore and plan for your nonfinancial activities in your retirement years. The earlier you do this the better, since the planning you do now can position you for greater fulfillment later.

Perhaps the easiest way to start the nonfinancial planning process is to ask, and honestly answer the following three questions:

1. What has made you happiest and provided the greatest gratification in your pre-retirement years? In short, what are your greatest passions?
2. What are your unique gifts and skills that can be best utilized to generate the most satisfaction following your career?
3. What can you do now to position yourself for the greatest impact on your world when you decide to scale back or retire from your current vocation?

The answers to questions like these are unique to every individual and will force you to wrestle with elusive concepts like "success," "satisfaction" and "happiness." Nonetheless, I think you'll find it thought-provoking and enjoyable to go through the exercise of contemplation and answering.

Perhaps it will be useful for you to read about my own discoveries as I navigated through this important planning effort. My financial planning began long before retirement but my nonfinancial lifestyle planning began in earnest just three years before my official transition out of my career and into the next phase of my life. Over that three-year period, I benefited from the advice of a financial advisor, a personal coach, and a spiritual coach. Although utilizing such advisors and coaches can be

enormously helpful and I would highly recommend it, I don't see it as an essential element of the process.

Answering the Passion Question

Most of us are happiest when we are pursuing our passions. So step one for me was to clearly identify those activities and pursuits that left me with the greatest sense of accomplishment, self-worth, and therefore, happiness. "What makes me tick?" I asked myself. I considered many possibilities, but the answer became clear when I thought about my participation in my church and other volunteer activities, my service on nonprofit boards and my coaching, teaching and mentoring young executives and employees. What makes me most happy is positively touching and impacting the lives of other human beings. So as I thoughtfully contemplated doing this in my future, I began to see retirement as a new beginning, a period of significance and impact rather than settling into a slower paced life of leisure. Think about those activities that give you the greatest joy and sense of fulfillment and then attempt to articulate your passions in a sentence or two.

Answering the Gifts and Skills Question

It's almost a certainty that there will be a high correlation between what you do well and what makes you happy. However, expand your thought process by reflecting on all kinds of moments in your life – beyond your work activities – when you have felt truly happy and fulfilled. What made time stand still? What were you doing just before that tremendous sense of accomplishment and wellbeing? When you remember, then ask yourself what you personally contributed to that experience and what value you added in the process.

For me, my ability to impact people's lives and to add value in interpersonal interactions during my career and in my volunteer activities most often utilized my financial acumen, my storytelling and writing skills as well as my teaching and mentoring abilities; and these abilities were always buttressed by my strong personal faith.

My passion was in positively impacting people's lives and the gifts and skills I utilized to do so became

pretty evident as I went through this thought process. So I realized that I should continue to pursue my passions post-retirement by effectively deploying my financial acumen, my teaching and mentoring skills and my storytelling and writing abilities, while doing so within the context and value system of my faith.

Answering the Preparation Question

Having identified your passions and your unique gifts and skills, you need to consider how you will prepare for the next phase of your life and, in so doing, maximize your effectiveness and your ultimate happiness.

Using my own example, my preparation involved several steps I initiated well before officially retiring – steps that not only set the stage for longer-term impact and fulfillment but also led to future endeavours well beyond my pre-retirement imagination.

Feeling strongly that I needed to enhance my spiritual education and development, I began to research and then apply for a post-graduate degree program in religion. Because I'd completed this work in advance, immediately upon retirement I commenced a program at Yale Divinity School that I found remarkably enjoyable and fulfilling.

Before retirement, I also began to construct a business school course on executive management and leadership in which I felt I could impact students' lives utilizing my teaching and writing skills. As a part of that process, I wrote 16 real-life case studies derived from my career experiences. Since retirement, I have been teaching this course and others as an adjunct professor at two business schools.

In line with my identified passions and skills, I also researched both the non-profit and for-profit organizations in which I felt I could add value utilizing my business and financial acumen and I now serve on five non-profit and two for-profit boards where I have been able to do exactly that.

Most recently I have set up a website, Godrevealed.com, where I have posted stories of my personal encounters with God over the course of my life.

The website has attracted nearly 100,000 visitors in less than a year and has proven to be an effective vehicle for expressing my faith and utilizing my storytelling skills.

It's both exhilarating and rewarding to know that my gifts and skills have found an avenue for such meaningful expression. The peace of mind that has come from following my passions and impacting the lives of other people has literally left me far happier than I have been in many years.

And one final thought: don't forget to remain physically active and take care of yourself. I believe that the combination of meaningful post-retirement engagement coupled with a physical exercise routine, proper sleep, and good eating habits has contributed to a dramatic improvement in all of my vital signs. One of the truly amazing outcomes in this phase of my life has been a sense of youthfulness many years younger than my chronological age.

If you'll follow your own passions in a way that effectively deploys your own unique gifts and skills, I'm certain that you too will feel happier, healthier and younger in retirement.

• • •



Fred Sievert retired as President of New York Life Insurance Co., a Fortune 100 Company, at the height of his career to attend Yale Divinity School. He is the author of the books: *God Revealed: Revisit Your Past to Enrich your Future* (Morgan James, 2014) and *Grace Revealed: Finding God's Strength in Any Crisis* (Broadstreet Publishing, 2018).



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To-Do List Got You Stressed?

| Just say no. Here's how



By **Ryan Trimble and David Maxfield**

"If somebody offers you an amazing opportunity but you are not sure you can do it, say yes—then learn how to do it later!" said billionaire Richard Branson.

Poet E.E. Cummings wrote, "I imagine that yes is the only living thing."

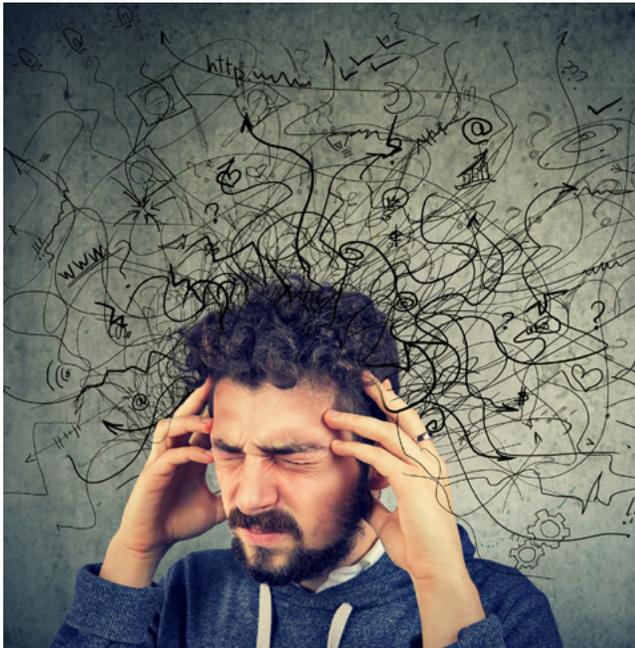
And Brazilian novelist Clarice Lispector said, "Everything in the world began with a yes."

Seems like sage insight. Saying yes leads to opportunities and outcomes. It involves action and activity, and invites engagement. 'Yes' is the affirmation that signals birth and beginning, a portent of possibility.

In the world of work, most see saying yes not just as necessary for seizing an opportunity, but as a duty and a virtue. So in the style of Buzz Lightyear, they say yes to almost every request. "To infinity and beyond!"

And the results are alarming.

[Our latest research](#) reveals that many people overcommit themselves. Sixty percent of respondents said their to-do lists contain more than they can complete in the given timelines. Another 20 percent said their to-do lists were at limit; they cannot commit to anything else. And these aren't isolated scenarios. In fact, 1 in 3 said they ALWAYS have more tasks in front of them than they can actually complete, and 2 in 3 said they USUALLY do.



As a result, people feel overworked and overstressed, and that affects health and wellbeing. Respondents reported the following side-effects of their over-commitment habits:

- **Stress:** 50 percent are moderately stressed, 35 percent are highly stressed, and 9 percent are extremely stressed.
- **Worry and Anxiety:** 52 percent are worried about letting themselves or others down and 41 percent are unsure of where to start in their efforts to accomplish their tasks.
- **Feeling Defeated:** 46 percent feel overwhelmed, and 20 percent regret agreeing to so much in the first place.

What's more, respondents said their to-do lists prevent them from being present, meaning they can't show up for the people and activities that matter most. Specifically, 44 percent said they are "really present" only half of the time, and 37 percent said they are rarely or never present. Only 1 percent said they are in a position to be always present.

That also means they probably aren't showing up for all the tasks they've agreed to. Instead of achieving outcomes and executing effectively, people who frequently say yes might also drop balls and miss deadlines. This compounds their stress.

But if saying yes leads to burnout and bonfires, why do it?

Respondents cite the following five reasons:

1. Desire to be helpful, accommodating, and polite (73 percent)
2. Tendency to jump in and fix problems, even when not responsible (56 percent)
3. Ambiguous limits and unclear rules about accepting or rejecting tasks (39 percent)
4. Working with those in authority who make non-negotiable demands (38 percent)
5. Inability to say no or renegotiate commitments (32 percent)

The takeaway is telling. People sacrifice wellbeing, relationships, and productivity for the sake of, well, productivity. In an effort to contribute much they actually curtail their ability to contribute.

Our research and observation over the years suggest this over-commitment epidemic is the result of poorly designed workflow management systems. Without a system designed to capture and organize incoming tasks and the skills to negotiate commitments, you're bound to find yourself a victim of an impossible to-do list.

But luckily, there's a solution. In fact, there are a small number of self-management practices that can literally change a person's life. When you learn to manage your workload efficiently, you'll not only take control of your to-do list, but you'll also avoid

the anxiety that comes with carrying an impossible workload. As an added bonus, when you have a clear view of your workload, you're less likely to commit to tasks you know you can't complete.

To achieve this type of serenity and regain control of your to-do list, follow these five [productivity practices](#):

1. Collect everything that owns your attention.

Capture all commitments, tasks, ideas, and projects in an external place rather than keeping them in your head. Use only a few capture tools you keep with you all the time, such as a notebook, an app, or email.

2. Do a commitment audit. Capture all of your commitments on one page. Then go down the list and decide which to-dos you will do, which you'll decline, and which you'll renegotiate. If there's no way you can do them all in the time given, be realistic about what you can and will do.

3. Identify next actions. Most people are overwhelmed by their lists because they are filled with vague phrases like "Budget" or "2019 Event." These unclear projects discourage rather than motivate us to act. Clarify your to-dos down to the very next action you'll take to move toward

closure. You can break the habit of procrastination and alleviate stress by clarifying tasks into smaller, actionable steps.

4. Do more of the right things by reflecting in the right moments. Rather than diving into your messy inbox first thing, take two minutes to review your calendar and your action lists. This reflection ensures you make the best decisions about how to use your time.

5. Review weekly. Keep a sacred, non-negotiable meeting with yourself every week to resync, get current, and align your daily work with your higher-level priorities.

With your sanity restored and to-do list corralled, you can regulate incoming tasks and commitments with one simple skill. When you need to decline or renegotiate a request, make it known that your goal is not to dodge work or avoid helping out, but rather to offer your full attention to the task. If that means postponing a deadline or involving others, suggest as much and seek mutual solutions. Saying no, after all, is just another way of saying yes to something of higher priority—like being productive without losing your mind.



David Maxfield is a New York Times bestselling author, keynote speaker, and leading social scientist for business performance. He leads the research function at VitalSmarts, a [corporate training and leadership development company](#). His work has been translated into 28 languages, is available in 36 countries, and has generated results for 300 of the Fortune 500.



Ryan Trimble is a lead writer at VitalSmarts. He works alongside the company's authors and researchers to identify and publicize trends in workplace communication and human behavior.



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Autopilot Of Success

| Success requires consistent action



 By **Jim Stovall**

My frequent flyer statements tell me I have flown well over two million miles. For the most part, airline travel is just a routine part of my business, but a handful of flights are memorable.

After speaking at an arena event in Vancouver, Canada, I boarded

a plane the next morning for a flight to Toronto for another event. As I settled into my seat, the pilot greeted me enthusiastically and told me he had been in the audience the previous night at the arena event where I had spoken. When he asked if there was anything special he could

do for me, I told him I would love to sit up in the cockpit with him and his colleagues; so after we took off and leveled out, the flight attendant came and got me and took me into the cockpit where the pilot introduced me to his copilot and the navigator. I had expected them all to be very busy flying the



plane, but they merely glanced at the computer and the gauges periodically as they continued to talk with me.

When I questioned how challenging it was to fly a jet thousands of miles across Canada, the pilot explained that the takeoffs and landings required a lot of attention, but otherwise, if you know where you're going and the route you want to take, the most efficient method of flying is to use the autopilot. Although I never have and never will fly a plane, that has proven to be amazing advice throughout the years. I have found that utilizing the autopilot concept has brought me a lot of success.

Among the fastest-growing groups of millionaires in our country today are the retirement-plan millionaires. These are individuals who consistently and unemotionally invest a set amount of money in their

retirement plan each month. What makes success possible for so many people is not the plan itself but the autopilot feature. This allows investors to make the right decision one time and reap the benefits for decades as the plan automatically takes money and deposits it in their retirement account every month. They're not forced to remember, stay committed, or even be aware of the fact that the plan is working on their behalf. This same concept will work for college funds, insurance plans, or simply building up an emergency savings account or a down payment for your next home.

If knowledge was the only key to success, we would all be rich, thin, and happy. Unfortunately, success requires consistent action, and any time we can make a commitment once and generate action far into the future, we are virtually guaranteeing our success.

As you go through your day today, decide where you're going, how you want to get there, and put the process on autopilot.

Today's the day!



Jim Stovall is the president of Narrative Television Network as well as a published author of many books including *The Ultimate Gift*. He is also a columnist and motivational speaker.



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Submit Your Articles

It's Not What You Say, It's How You Say It

Are you conscious of how your tone of voice is conveying your message?



By **Greg Zlevor**

We've all heard those words since we were in elementary school, but as it turns out, the cliché has more scientific merit than we may have realized. Sincerity, enthusiasm, compassion, attention, concern, warmth, self-confidence, and authority cannot be feigned; your listener will be affected by your tone, whether they (or you!) are aware of it or not.

Conversely, negative emotions such as stress, nervousness, resentment, anger, defensiveness or even boredom can seep through and impact inflection, potentially conveying an undesired undertone that has an effect on the receiver.

The dictionary defines *tone* as the modulation of pitch, quality, and strength that adds semantic

meaning to a word or phrase; 'tone of voice' is the underlying base note in a verbal interaction between two or more people. People may appear to be listening to your *words*, but they are unconsciously reacting to your *tone* and their response will be a result of this interplay.

It is widely understood among linguistic researchers that if

there is a mismatch between a speaker's words and the tone of their voice, most of the time, people will trust what they sense in the tone over the actual words. One's tone has the power to shut down communication, trust, confidence, agreement, and possibilities.

Are you conscious of how your tone of voice is conveying your message? It is far more important in communication than most people realize. Experts say we have only about 90 seconds to establish rapport when we first encounter someone; this means that adjusting our conversational speaking tone to match the context is crucial for success.

Since most of us attend primarily to the *content* of our message, it is in our best interest to bring our *inner* voice up to a conscious level, so that we may make a choice about the timing, tone and method of our delivery. Simply stated: putting yourself in the right attitude from the start ensures that the goal of your communication syncs with what you actually want to convey.

Once you begin to unpack the unconscious ways that speech pattern, tone and body language affect how we perceive what is being conveyed in a conversation, it quickly becomes clear that our extralinguistic cues have a complex interaction with our spoken words, regardless of language or culture.

Reflecting on how many times we engage in meaningful

communication each day, be it pitching a project, negotiating a contract, interviewing for a job, training a co-worker, assisting a customer, selling a product, networking for your business, or even asking someone out on a date, if your position depends on a clear interaction, then aligning the nuance of tone in your verbal communication becomes paramount.

What Can I Practice Right Now?

If your role at work relies on clear communication with co-workers or clients, understanding and controlling the nuance of tone in your verbal interactions is an important place to start. Try a few of these suggestions and see how deftly your ability to connect shifts!

- To really connect and build rapport in face-to-face conversation, try synchronizing your tone to match that of your conversational partner.
- The next time you find yourself reacting adversely to something someone is saying to you, identify the disconnect between their words and what their *tone* is actually conveying. Sometimes it's easier to recognize the dissonance in someone else, and this can be helpful when learning to align your own words and tone.
- During an important and challenging conversation, consciously connect with your inner mindset at that moment. Really notice your feelings toward the receiver and any hidden agenda you

may have. Take a breath and then align the *tone* of your communication so that it corresponds with the actual intention of your message. This can be more difficult than it sounds!

- Smile! Your tone is warmer when you smile as you speak.
- Practice speaking at a lower pitch; it has been shown that deeper voices convey more credibility.
- Your body posture and your breathing affect your tone of voice. Do a quick check to optimize the effectiveness of your communication.

• • •



Greg Zlevor is the CEO, President, and Founder of Westwood International, a consulting collaborative that's reimagining what it means to lead wisely in a global age. Most recently, Greg in concert with some of his global clients including J&J, Honeywell, MGM and others has spearheaded the formation of The Global Community for Leadership Innovation (GCLI), a collaborative of global companies that work together to discuss and explore new modes of best practices within Leadership Development.



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Self-Awareness: The Key To Transformation

Understand what you need to change and how to go about it

 By **Ken Keis**

Let me ask you this question:

If nothing changed in your life in the next five years, would that be okay?

I mean *everything* in your life—your health, relationships, friends, career, feelings of fulfillment, achievement and so on.

Let's move the calendar ahead five years.

- You are the same person
- The conditions in your life are the same as they are today

Is that okay with you?

For the majority of you, it would *not* be.

One definition of insanity is to continue to do the same things over and over again, and expect different results. If you want different results, you must *change* what you are doing and/or the way you are doing it.

Before you can act with *purpose* and direction, you must understand what you need to change and how to go about it.

When you are not self-aware about your own preferences, gifts, talents and tendencies, it's impossible to act intentionally. If you are not aware, you are living life—day after day, year after year—oblivious to your own thought patterns and beliefs.

All of us have met people who are completely unaware that their behavior and conduct are inappropriate and affecting others. They have no clue they are clueless.

As a frequent traveler, I spot unawareness on every one of my trips:

- people who stop at the bottom of an UP escalator, staring into space, with no idea they are holding up the line of fellow travelers forming behind them
- people who let their carry-on bags hit each seated person in the head as they make their way down the aisle.

In his book, *Excuses Begone!: How to Change Lifelong, Self-Defeating Thinking Habits*, Wayne Dyer said it well:

The reason why awareness of awareness is so powerful is that it immediately puts me in touch with a dimension of myself that knows that: here in awareness, all things are possible.

Wayne went on to quote a Harvard Study that tracked 84 female room attendants who were working in different hotels.

The women were divided into two groups.

1. For the control group, it was “business as usual.”
2. The second group was told that their work was “exercise.”



- The group that recognized their work as exercise experienced significant health benefits. In just four weeks, they dropped weight and lowered their blood pressure, body fat and body mass index.
- The control group (“business as usual”) experienced no improvements, despite engaging in the same physical activities as the second group.

This study reveals that your attitude—which is linked to awareness—can have profound effects on your well-being.

Awareness of our beliefs is one thing. But what about awareness of our style (“Personal Style”) preferences and all the implications they have in every part of our daily life?

A study conducted by TalentSmart discovered that less than 30% of the population has a solid understanding of their own style preferences.

This means that about 70% of the population has no inkling of how they appear to and interact with others. They have little idea of their strengths and skills, and without knowing what they are, they can’t implement them properly. In the study, the 70% who were oblivious about their Personal Style had considerably more difficulty handling stress and interpersonal relationships.

The study compared people’s levels of self-awareness to their ability to achieve the things they found most important in life:

- Satisfaction with life increases dramatically with self-awareness.
- People who are self-aware are far more likely to reach their goals.
- “Aware” individuals take time to first learn and then understand their Personal Style so they can better respond to life’s challenges and opportunities.
- Because they understand their situation and can identify the people who will help make them successful, they can more easily implement the right strategies.
- They also understand their limitations and adjust their attitude and behavior accordingly to minimize any negative impact.

- They know what they really want; their awareness motivates them to take the best steps and actions to get where they want to be.

Self-awareness is so predominant to success that it transcends age, intelligence, education, profession and job level. The TalentSmart study found that 83% of top performers are high in self-awareness, no matter their industry or profession, yet just 2% of low performers possess that critical skill.

The reality is that individuals who understand their style preferences and tendencies are much more likely to play to their strengths at work and home, limit the negative impact of their deficiencies and get the results they desire.

When you become *aware*, you cease being a victim of your circumstances. You own your own space.

In my younger years, I was not self-aware. During my first few months of college, I learned the power of self-awareness. It was my first time away from home and out of town, and let’s just say, I let loose. I became boisterous and loud in an attempt to be the center of attention. My quest was to get people to like me, but the outcome of my actions was the opposite: *“Oh, no! Here comes Ken!”*

About three months into my first semester, I had a chance to sit down and have a couple of drinks with one of the sharp girls in our dorm. Thirty minutes into our conversation, she said, “You’re not a jerk, after all. In fact, you’re a really nice guy!”

In complete shock, I asked her what she meant.

“Ken, you are loud, and sometimes obnoxious. You try way too hard. It really is quite irritating. But in this conversation today, you are calm, interesting and focusing on our discussion.”

I was immature and unaware that my actions were driving people away, not bringing them closer.

You don’t have to wait until college to be self-aware. When my son, Tim, was in eighth grade, we started

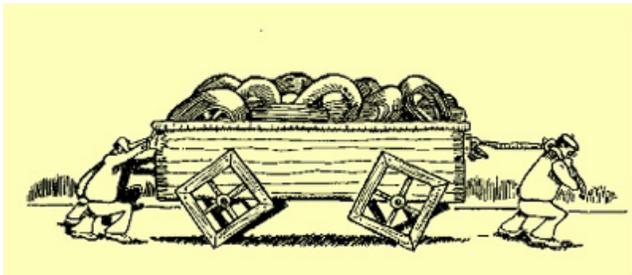
to coach him on the impact his Personal Style was having in his environment. We were creating self-awareness in him.

Tim's style is active and verbal, contrary to the learning model in education that wants everyone to be compliant and quiet. A lot of tension had developed between my son and one of the younger, less-experienced teachers. Her response to Tim's verbal nature was to try to put tighter controls on him, which only exacerbated the situation. She was not aware, either.

We coached him to manage his verbal nature and tone it down a bit. We did not want to change who he was, but we wanted him to be aware that his verbal energy was disrupting the class. Less than a week later, he burst through our door at home, excited to tell us that class was going a lot better. I asked how he was achieving that excellent result. "Dad," he said, "I learned how to shut up!"

Tim was so proud of his ability to manage his self, while being self-aware. If a 13 year-old can do that, anyone can.

Square Wheels



Used with permission by www.squarewheels.com

When you look at the image above of the wagon with the square wheels, what do you see and think?

- What do the square wheels represent as a metaphor for your life—both at home and at work? You might answer with words like *struggle*, *difficult*, *inefficient*, *challenge*, *hard*, *toiling*, *stuck*—even *silly*.
- What about the people behind the wagon? What do they see? Only the back of the wagon! What is their perspective on life and this situation? For sure, it's limited.

- What about the person pulling the wagon? What is he thinking and experiencing? Is he wondering if anyone will come along to help? He's not looking back to see if there is any way to improve the situation.
- And what about the round wheels inside the wagon? What do they represent? Do words and ideas like *opportunity*, *improvement*, *easier way*, *upgrade*, *progress*, *a different way of doing things* come to mind?

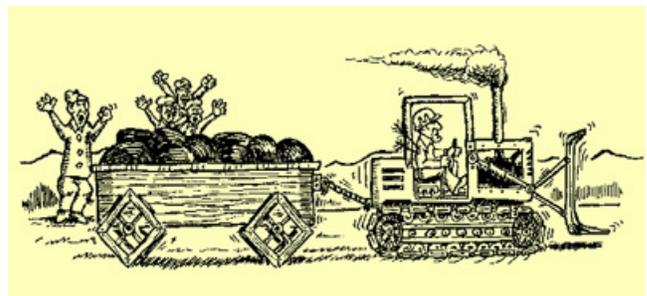
Naturally, this will lead to more questions.

- Why are they stuck—both the leader and the followers?
- Why don't they put the round wheels on the wagon or at least consider doing that?
- How far away are the round wheels? The wheels are readily available, but the leader and the followers are unaware of the opportunities.

Have you ever met someone who is dealing with a problem and the answer to his or her dilemma is obvious—right in front of their eyes—but they still don't get it? The answer they seek is right there, but he can't, or won't, see it. They are completely oblivious to the opportunity.

I admit, in the past, to being quick to judge when individuals did not see the obvious. I now understand it was not obvious to them. Rather than standing in judgment, let's move to helping and coaching people to see their prospects.

After more than 30 years of serving others in the field of personal and professional development, I see many situations like the one depicted in the second illustration below.



Used with permission by www.squarewheels.com

A caterpillar tractor is now pulling the square-wheeled wagon!

- This is the thinking: “Let’s commit ourselves 100% to our square wheels. Let’s take what has not been working and do it harder.”

I see this every week in individuals, families, teams, organizations—even governments—that dedicate themselves to their square wheels. They embrace the certainty of misery rather than the misery of uncertainty.

If you look closely at the second illustration, you’ll notice that arrows are sticking out of the driver’s back. The blind devotion to broken, unproductive habits causes pain to everyone involved.

So, what about you?

- Where in your life—personal and interpersonal effectiveness as well as career fulfillment—are you holding on to square wheels?
- Where have you blindly—without conscious intention or awareness—stayed committed to your square wheels?

Here’s my challenge to you:

Everyone has a few square wheels—including myself. Rather than protecting the status quo, I’m encouraging you to start looking for and using round wheels. As you can see, the round wheels are within reach—if you choose to embrace change using new information.

We at CRG provide “round wheels” for you in my book, [Why Aren’t You More Like Me?](#) If you find its message helpful, please share it with others. Assist them with their awareness and help them use “round wheels” for their journey along life’s path.

Be aware that to live a satisfying, fulfilled and successful life, understanding your Personal Style and the styles of others is not an option. It is essential! By completing [CRG’s Personal Style Indicator](#) assessment, you will learn about your Personal Style preferences and patterns and the other factors that constantly influence your reality.

Self-awareness without action is not beneficial to anyone. Like anything else, if you don’t use it, you lose it. By exercising your knowledge, you have the opportunity to transform not only your life, but the lives of others along the way.

CRG’s calling is to assist others to live, lead and work *on purpose*—including helping people discover their passion and *learn how to live it*, intentionally, every day. An *on-purpose* person has a vibrant mind, body and soul.

To confirm your beliefs and *purpose* in all areas of your life, I recommend my newest book, [The Quest For Purpose](#). It will take you on a personal journey of discovery to help you confirm and affirm your passions in life.



Ken Keis, Ph.D. is a foremost global authority on behavioral assessment strategies and processes, and an expert in leadership, purpose, and wellness. He has authored over 4 million words of content, including 500 articles, 4 books, and a dozen assessments to help others realize their full potential. President and CEO of Consulting Resource Group International (CRG), Dr. Keis has worked with many high-profile companies, associations, and industry groups. In the past 30 years, Ken has conducted more than 3,000 presentations and 10,000 hours of coaching and consulting. He is a highly sought-after author, speaker, trainer, media guest and also host of *The Secrets of Success Podcast with Dr. Ken Keis*.



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Leverage Your **Introverted** Networking Energy

| 5 tips to follow



 By **Michelle Tillis Lederman**

Why do we have a visceral reaction to the word networking? I often hear the mental machinations that hold us back like, “I have nothing to say.” or “They don’t want to talk to me.” The other roadblock is how it feels... yucky! I have heard people refer to networking as manipulation, pasting on a smile, schmoozing, (which sounds like

oozing, which makes me think of an open wound – definitely yucky!)

You see someone working in the room. They are always engaged in conversation, smiling, maybe laughing loudly and often. Do you look at that person and think; “Wow, I wish I could network like that.” Do you think there is a way

networking “should be”? Or do you have a vision for what a “good networker” does or looks like? I am here to tell you the most effective networking doesn’t look or feel like networking.

What do you like to do? Do you prefer to do things in big groups or one-on-one? Or maybe you feel most comfortable connecting

virtually? Our energy ebbs and flows during different times of day, in different situations, locations, and atmospheres. Once we understand the nature of our **Networking Energy**, we can use it to create opportunities that work with our natural and preferred style. Remember, we don't want to fake it: pretending to be up when we're down, pretending to be fascinated when we're bored just doesn't work.

So eliminate your existing perceptions about the way networking "should" be. Each of us must find the networking situations that we *want* to go to, not the ones we think we should attend. When you choose situations in which you are most comfortable – in other words; match your networking energy – your authentic self will emerge. When that happens, you display confidence and leverage your natural style.

If you are an introvert, the key is to listen to your own rhythms. Don't try to emulate your extroverted colleagues; instead, pay attention to what makes *you* comfortable. Here are five tips to leverage your introverted networking energy.

1. Arrive Early. At the start of an event, everyone is a little lost and looking for someone to talk with. It is actually easier to find someone to chat with when the room is not yet crowded. Throughout the night, those early conversations become familiar faces that are

easier to approach when the conversations become larger groups.

- 2. Stay Late.** The end of the event is another more relaxed time for connecting. The energy in the room has calmed and conversations seem to come easier with the practice from earlier. Helping to pack up or walk out with someone is disarming and enables an ease with a timed end to a new conversation.
- 3. Volunteer.** Having a job assigned gives you both purpose and permission to talk with people. Even easier, you have a built-in topic related to your volunteer post. The goal will be to expand on the conversation.
- 4. Position Yourself.** Even if you do not have a specific role assigned, you can still position yourself in a place where people may ask for help. By the door, you can direct people to the registration area. In the lobby area people are always looking for the restroom. Make yourself useful and quick connection points can lead to longer conversations.
- 5. Take Breaks.** This is key to keeping a productive energy throughout an event. Stepping out for some air, a bathroom break, or the quick cell phone check gives an introvert the time needed to re-energize and return ready to connect.

At the end of the day, whatever *you* decide feels authentic and true then that's your networking energy. I can tell you all day that

not talking constantly or preferring to talk one-on-one is ok, but the only thing that will make it ok for you is that *YOU* decide it's ok.

Connectors do not need to be extroverts! Many introverts are amazing Connectors with their own way to do it. They leverage their natural listening skills to make people feel heard. They are able to focus their attention on the person in front of them. All of these innately introverted qualities are advantages when it comes to connection.



Michelle Tillis Lederman is the author of [*The Connector's Advantage: 7 Mindsets to Grow Your Influence and Impact*](#) and CEO of Executive Essentials, a communications and management training and coaching firm.



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Look In The Mirror

8 hard questions to ask yourself before launching a startup



By **Charles D. Morgan**

I have read that 90 percent of business startups fail, and that most of them don't survive past their fourth year. As one who has spent the past decade battling every conceivable form of chaos a tech startup can encounter, I have a few thoughts on why so many startups don't survive. In many, if not most, cases, I believe the seeds of failure are planted even before the business is launched. That's why I recommend that anyone even *thinking* of launching a startup begin by asking him- or herself the following questions. And remember, you're only compounding the problem if you're not brutally honest with your answers:

1. Am I Running Toward Something, or Away From Something?

So many people do a startup for the wrong reasons: *I hate being a lawyer, I think I'll start an online men's store!* Believe me, launching a startup as a way of escaping a job or life you're unsatisfied with is akin to leaping into the fire to avoid the heat of the kitchen. Here's another especially ill-considered rationale: *I'm going to launch a startup and sell it for a billion dollars!* In this case, you may think you're running *toward* something, but I guarantee you that your chances of catching the elusive unicorn are about the same as winning the lottery, and you have to work a whole lot harder.

The fact is, most successful entrepreneurs have their motivations, and it's not about making money. That alone is an empty and ultimately unsatisfying pursuit. In my case, I love the process of building a team, setting a strategy, and solving problems. I'm an engineer by training, and my business background is in data mining and its accompanying technology. So in launching a company to provide scam protection to

the major telecoms, I was *building on* my experience and expertise, not running from it.

That's the tack I recommend to any would-be entrepreneur. Even so, no startup is a walk in the park.

2. Do I Have a Plan or Just a Dream?

Entrepreneurs tend to be single-minded and in some ways that's a good thing. You've got to keep plugging away, no matter what the world throws at you.

But you also have to be open to listening, learning, and shifting direction according to the prevailing winds. Sometimes that's hard for entrepreneurs, who are so invested emotionally in their idea – their original idea, as originally conceived – that they're rendered deaf and blind. When you have a dream, it's very easy to lie to yourself in spite of what the world is telling you.

An idea is only the starting point. Any successful startup will have pivoted numerous times over its lifetime. Today's world moves too fast. Those who don't adjust and adapt will be left behind.

3. Do I Know What I Don't Know?

This is probably the most important point for any entrepreneur, and it's one more reason to launch a business in your own general field. Otherwise, you're sure to be blindsided over and over. What you don't know can definitely hurt you.

That said, my present company, First Orion, which launched in 2008, operates in the then-uncharted territory of mobile technology. We wandered in the wilderness for a long time, not having a clue about all the things we didn't know. There were so many

variables that any number we wrote down on a pro forma was about as accurate as any other number would have been.

It took us nine years to achieve our initial goal, and during that time we learned a whole lot about the things we hadn't known going in. Now that we've successfully placed a scam protection solution within the network of a major telecom, I like to think our future path will be smoother because we've at least walked it before. This is probably wishful thinking.



4. How's My Blood Pressure?

Are you a worrier? Are you comfortable taking risks? Does not knowing what next month will bring cause you debilitating stress?

If you answered any of those in the affirmative, you may not be cut out for entrepreneurship. All startups are stress tests, and not just at the beginning – the uncertainty, the curve balls, the ambushes, the oh-no's, the what-now's, they're constant. At my company, we're 10 years in and we're *still* in startup mode. Along

the way, our then-CEO suffered a heart attack. Alcohol has occasionally reared its head (you definitely don't want your close business partner to be Jack Daniels).

Your health is important, and a startup can go a long way toward wrecking it: late nights, little sleep, bad take-out, too much coffee, no exercise, lack of fresh air. It can be suffocating.

5. What If I Bankrupt My Family?

At a party a few decades ago I met Fred Smith, the founder of FedEx. His company was about three years old at the time, and it was bleeding money. "I'm in trouble with my family," he told me. I don't have space here to tell the whole story, but suffice it to say that not only had Fred bet his own farm, he had bet his *family's* farm as well.

Though he ultimately succeeded brilliantly, Fred Smith's story is a cautionary tale about bet-it-all risk-taking in business. My advice, if you want to sleep at night, is not to get yourself that close to the precipice. I recommend two things: One, surround yourself with loyal, supportive, deep-pocketed family and friends. And two, never invest more of your own money than you can stand to lose.

That's easy to say, however, and very hard to practice. There's a haunting passage from Elbert Hubbard: "The line between failure and success is so fine that we scarcely know when we pass it – so fine that we are often on the line and do not know it. How many a man has thrown up his hands at a time when a little more effort, a little more patience, would have achieved success."

It's a great quote, but it also underscores how easy it is to invest *just a little more*, and then a *tiny bit more*, until one day you wake up at the bottom of a slippery slope.

6. How Do I Feel About Ruining My Marriage?

It's a definite possibility. A startup is all consuming, and your spouse will likely experience it in one of two ways: Either you're gone all the time, or you're out of your mind. Neither is a good recipe for marriage.

A supportive spouse is a huge help when you're in the throes of getting a business off the ground, so consider your spouse among your most important stakeholders. Pay homage, and come home for dinner occasionally – better yet, take her or him out to eat. And don't spend the whole evening bitching about all the challenges you're facing at work.

A final note about spouses and startups: If your startup goes down the tubes, your spouse is the one and only stakeholder you can even *hope* will stay by your side. Behave accordingly.

7. What If I Fail?

There's a very real chance that your startup won't succeed, and you need to prepare yourself upfront for that. I don't mean you should prepare to fail; rather, you should steel your mind to your own self-worth.

On my office wall I keep a photograph of Albert Einstein, one of my heroes. He was a problem solver par excellence, and he also had something to say – albeit obliquely – about failing: “A ship is always safe at shore but that is not what it's built for.” Fear of failure can itself be a kind of failure. Your choice is simple: You can stay safe on the shore, or you can take a chance out on the angry sea. And if you go down, at least you've given it your best shot.

But don't let that be the end of it. I also like the famous quote from the writer Samuel Beckett: “Ever tried. Ever failed. No matter. Try again. Fail again. Fail better.”

8. Do I Have the Skills to Lead a Startup Team to Success?

If you look over the various websites that keep track of startups, you'll see that about 40 percent fail because of incompetence. And oh, there are *so many* ways that even seasoned CEOs can occasionally act incompetently in the heat of a startup. Just read my book and you'll see.

But if I had to name one characteristic of a great startup leader, it's that he or she has to be comfortable in a boots-on-the-ground setting, as opposed to sitting in an executive office away from the fray. Startup teams smother within a traditional,

rigid hierarchy; they have to be fast and nimble, like a platoon of guerilla fighters. So the first job of a leader is to establish a flat, flexible organization that allows ad hoc teams to be formed as necessary.

Another vital role of a startup leader is to keep the team focused. One of the dangers in a startup is that when things aren't going well, some team members panic and get sidetracked, suggesting all sorts of short-term ways to bring in revenue. A good leader won't stand for that – in a startup you never know when, or if, you're going to break through, but you *have* to keep your eye on your goal. Once you lose your focus, you're doomed.

Finally, a good leader has to be able to make tough decisions. At First Orion, we had spent years rocking along in the red, and I was tired of writing checks. One day I announced that we were going to be profitable in six months. Everyone just stared at me, dumbfounded; they didn't believe it. But I had a belt-tightening plan that I imposed. It wasn't easy and it wasn't painless, but it worked.

And I will tell you this: There's nothing like finally getting into the black to give a startup a new lease on life.

• • •



Charles D. Morgan is the visionary former Chairman and CEO of Acxiom Corporation, and is now Chairman and CEO of his latest tech venture, First Orion.



 Now What? The Biography of a (Finally) Successful Startup.

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