

The Power of Choosing Your Direction

During a recent small business event the question was asked, "How many of the businesses present have business plans?" Only 25% of the businesses there had plans. It was shocking that in this economy businesses were not strategizing on how to grow their business. To grow a business it is important to have a business plan that outlines what the company's goals are and how they are going to reach those goals. A company can not survive, let alone grow, by sitting around expecting customers to show up. The company needs to know what it wants to become, whether that is a multi-national corporation or the best coffee shop in a 10 mile radius, in order to get there. But without knowing where they are going, without first defining what success looks like, there is no way that they will reach their success.

But then it hit me . . . how many of us do not have life plans?

Living without a plan is like driving without a road map. You can't get there if you don't know where you are going. You might be driving all day but if you don't know if you are going to Los Angeles or New York, where will you end up? You are just adding mileage but not moving toward a specific destination. How often do we find ourselves doing the same thing in our lives? We are constantly busy, constantly doing, but not being aware if this "doing" is getting us any closer to our place of happiness. We work harder and harder, but we are not working with a focused intention on a goal. We spend our time reacting to outside stimuli and to do's instead of proactively pursuing our dreams. We always seem to be busy but are we busy with the things that bring us happiness? Or are our undirected efforts bringing us stress?

Define Your Destination

To be truly happy and successful, it is important to define what success and happiness look like for you and then set a plan to reach that success. This first part, defining success, is often difficult for people. There are many reasons for this. One is that we are filled with the goals of others; the dreams our parents have for us, the desires marketers tell us we should have, and the values of our peer group. To define what success means to you, it is necessary to look inward. To get in touch with your true desires and what truly makes you happy. It is necessary to remove all the thoughts that start with "I should" or "I have to". But to look at what truly makes us happy no matter if what makes us happy is understood or approved by others. No one else is living your life, but you. So you are the only one you need to please with your life plan.

When defining your goal, be sure to define what you want not just what you don't want. It is very easy to say what we don't want, to define what makes us unhappy. "I don't want to work in corporate America." "I don't want to marry someone who is selfish." But how much more powerful is it to describe what we do want. Not wanting to work in corporate America opens the door to tons of things, working for a privately or family owned company, owning a franchise, being a freelance artist, or working in a service industry. By defining specifically what it is, not just what it isn't, you can create a richer definition of your destination. Knowing specifically what you want helps you focus your actions on it and will help you say no to the things that are off focus.

As you are working on defining your goal, don't fall into the trap of worrying about the how. So often we dismiss the perfect life for ourselves because we can not see how to accomplish it. When you are searching for what makes you truly happy, stay in that creative, fun, sky's the limit phase. Once you have the definition that is perfect for you and makes your heart sing, then you can put on your rational hat and problem solve on how to get there. But if you critique every initial idea you have, you may dismiss your absolute true happiness just because you can not see how to achieve it right now.

Create Your Map

Once you have your well detailed destination, now is the time to map out how it will happen. This is often the point in the process where many people get stuck. If you are a waitress in Dubuque, Iowa and

your goal is to be an artist in Paris, France, moving from A to B is unfathomable. Try looking at what needs to happen just before you reach your end goal and alternative that with what is the next step you can take right now. In this example, before you can be living in France you need to look at apartments in Paris. Or looking at right now, taking a course to learn French may be a great step you can take now to begin moving toward your goal. Keep working from both points A and B until the steps meet then you have your roadmap.

It is important to set down your definition of success and how to get there in writing. Putting pen to paper transforms a concept into a reality for you. It allows you to truly visualize it, begin taking steps, and monitor your progress. The way you write it down does not matter. It can be in the form of a 20-page life plan, a few sentences, an outline, or a vision board. Use the format that feels right to you. But take the time to put it into writing so that you can see and detail your goal clearly.

When you are ready to stop spinning your wheels driving around in circles, turn off your engine for a bit and take the time to study the map. Choose your destination. Then start down the road of life headed toward your definition of success. You will be amazed by the joy, happiness, love, abundance, and prosperity that you will find on your travels.

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