

The Road to Somewhere Else

Planning does become the crucial difference, because failing to plan is-on some level planning to fail.

"...you can't make good plans until you have some raw material to plan with. You need knowledge and experience."

-David Campbell, *If You Don't Know Where you're Going, You'll probably End up Somewhere Else*

Who knew that back in 1988 I would read a great little book that would become the subject of my life's work? David Campbell's book, *If You Don't Know Where you're Going, You'll probably End Up Somewhere Else* was published in 1974 and since it was still available some fourteen years later, I figured that it may contain some answers that I needed to have. Although I was a little late, I knew I had to read a book whose title had such great promise. At the time, I was just getting into work as a career transition consultant and had an insatiable desire to know all I could to help me and my clients make the most of our time here. After all, I have never wanted to end up "somewhere else," and thought it was safe to assume that no one did.

Needless to say, the book delivered on its promise, albeit in rather simplistic terms. What Campbell basically tells us is true: making the most of our "assets" will increase the number of options we have available to us in life. Choice is the key theme, to know and recognize the choices, we have to make our lives all they are meant to be. We ought to set our goals in an open-ended, open-minded sort of way, recognizing that change is inevitable. We have all heard this before, but how do we actually identify what we want from life, whether in our work or personal endeavors?

Campbell offers up several ideas on how we might be able to acquire certain levels of mastery through exposure to various work areas early on that could help us clarify our abilities. But that is only one side of the equation. We might be good at something but not like doing it and we may even like to do something that we end up not being very skilled at. So we need to ascertain our level of interest to determine how motivated we are to perform certain tasks associated with particular work. Having the appropriate level of skill and motivation now creates a greater opportunity for success.

If individuals need help finding meaningful work, can this mean that we also need to be assisted with creating meaningful personal lives, after the workday and work life is over? The answer is yes, for most of us. We could benefit from information during our decision-making process in all areas. And this acknowledgement led me to specific questions about love, marriage, and parenting choices, in addition to questions about career path selection.

We are it first

The fact is that we are asked to make these critical life decisions at a time when it is unlikely that we have had the life experiences or understanding that could allow for the most favorable outcome. Planning does become the crucial difference, because failing to plan is planning to fail on some level. While this is true, it is still, as Campbell notes, with the understanding that flexibility is key; this quest is a process, not an end. "There is only the road to somewhere, and we are always on the way."

In other words, as we sense a direction for our lives, based on good solid input from our internal guide, we should continue to adhere to the premise that an open mind enables us to be responsive to each moment.

Planning, or setting goals, is not entirely about acquiring information and acting accordingly, in order to make certain things happen. We do not become someone because we have possessed and done certain things. Instead, goals come from the recognition of who we are first so that we might do the things to get us to have the kind of satisfaction we imagine in our best life. So the question gets back to the how. How do we engage in the most appropriate planning of our lives if we lack the tools?

My timely involvement in a number of personal assessment instruments was also portended and one of these, the John Holland survey, is mentioned in Campbell's book. Holland is a psychology professor from John Hopkins University who has studied occupations for years and defined six categories of occupational preferences, according to individual attractions to these fields. Taking the time to self-report interests when forced into certain types of work can assist an individual in identifying areas of appeal, but this probably needs to be supplemented by what is referred to as psychological assessment of individual needs, which gets to the heart of what we almost

must do, if our goal is to be happy. After all, beyond a certain point, our interests, depending upon the degree, become psychological needs.

Campbell suggests that we have at least one area of "intensity," but I will refer to it as passion and define it as a compelling desire to do and have because of who we already are. Unless we were blessed with a burning desire early on in our childhood and then fortunate enough to have that passion fostered by those responsible to guide us, we are among the many who are faced with a challenging decision-making process. The decision to pursue higher education, select a career path, and make determinations on love and parenting present themselves and we will choose from among our options. And while we are not entirely without some notion of our leanings, there are a number of distractions and circumstances that come into play, possibly leading us to unhappiness, frustration and regret.

Doing and having is meaningless without self-knowledge. The only way to be more certain is to get in touch with the "daimon" that James Hillman speaks of in his best-selling book, *The Soul's Code*. We were born with it, he posits, and perhaps lost our way for one of the reasons I mention above. We only need to be reminded and take a step back from the "noise." One definite tool that is available to all of us is to have our motivations and needs assessed, which is not scary, not mysterious or misleading or even apt to pigeonhole us into a category of undesirability. It helps us answer that imperative inquiry of self-discovery, which is the first step in the goal setting process. We simply cannot choose properly without this knowledge about ourselves.

Serving Yourself

I have used personal assessment with great regularity in my work to date. When a candidate reviews the outcome on these inventories, it is never a matter of complete astonishment regarding their results, but about the meaning behind the results. It is more like someone gave them the right to finally embrace their true selves in a way that they had not done before. For one reason or another, they had not accepted or fully embodied the truth about who they were and now, with the acknowledgment of a name put to their "preference," their needs are highlighted in a non-judgmental manner and they are generally pleased, even if it means that they have to consider a dramatic change. They often rejoice in the excitement of this information. "I knew there was something missing, but I never knew what it was, now I have a name for it," many say.

Admittedly, consulting in the outplacement arena finds me working with adults who have invested ten, twenty, and even thirty years in a field or job before they take this step back to examine where they have been, how they may have gotten there, and how closely it matched who they are. At this point, I am more likely to hear elements of fear in pursuing a passion or dream-strictly due to their age and/or responsibilities at this juncture. Clients question the practicality of it all, but they never regret the newfound knowledge.

The real lesson is for our youngest people, adolescent to young adult age, that precious time when we are expected to make those daunting decisions. Think of the impact of being handed such valuable information at the beginning, rather than in later life. Assessment is most invaluable when we have the greatest opportunity to implement choices that make the most sense for who we are and what we are uniquely here to accomplish. Even if we are only able to view it from the perspective of avoiding mistakes, it continues to have merit.

The obvious implication in parenting is invaluable as well, particularly for those who distress over guiding their children. No one trains us to be parents-the best we can hope for is that we had good role models to demonstrate how to do the right thing as we direct our offspring, fully recognizing that the day will come when we will need to just let go. How much better might we feel if we were able to do that with the kind of satisfaction we can obtain from the clarification and acceptance of our child's true heart's desire.

Many of us may prefer to simply let life happen, guiding our children into the most secure and financially promising fields, with all good intention and practical concern. I do not advise giving that all up. It is fine to hold ideals and values and even to communicate those values to our children. But what we cannot do is make them believe as we do at the expense of their own dreams. Rather than remain attached to our objective, our best job is to teach them to listen to their own hearts, for that is truly the only way that they can be happy and successful individuals.

This does not necessarily require an assessment instrument, but it will require us to pay very close attention to them, what they do, what they like, their preferences when given options, and then listening when they attempt to reveal to us who they truly are. If we accept them as they are, they will learn to pursue dreams in direct concert with their internal guidance, needing no assistance from any instrument. Rather, they will embrace their purpose with intention and determination. They will learn to listen without distraction. By giving them this gift, we set the

stage for them to make all their life choices coming from this level of comfort and belief in themselves. But we must first have that kind of trust and belief in ourselves.

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