

# The Paradox of Personal Meaning



By Kent M. Keith

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To my parents, Bruce and Evelyn Keith,  
and my mother-in-law, Misao Tsuruha Carlson,  
with thanks for teaching the next generation  
what life is really about.

# The Paradox of Personal Meaning

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## PREFACE

I believe that each of us can always find personal meaning and deep happiness. However, finding personal meaning is paradoxical. When things are going badly and you don't expect to find meaning, you can still find it. On the other hand, when things are going well and you expect to find meaning, it can be hard to find. That's because finding personal meaning is not about whether things are going well or badly. Finding meaning is about your values and your relationships with others. You need to stay focused on those things, whether the world is treating you badly or the world is treating you well.

It may be especially hard to find meaning when the world is treating you well. According to our culture, symbols of success like power, wealth, fame, prestige, and social status are supposed to give us meaning and make us happy. Unfortunately, research and personal experience show us that those symbols of success provide little personal meaning and deep happiness. For that, we have to look elsewhere. That's what this book is about.

The origin of this book goes back more than twenty years, when I was writing *Anyway: The Paradoxical Commandments*. It was the back half of the original manuscript for that book. The first half of the manuscript, which was published in 2001, was about finding meaning in the face of *adversity*. The second half, which was not published, was about finding meaning in the face of *success*. It was not published because my publishers felt that it made the first *Anyway* book too long.

I thought that the second half of that original manuscript would become my second book, so I redrafted it as a stand-alone publication. But my publisher wanted a handbook to follow the first book, so I wrote *Do It Anyway*. Then they said that they were getting inquiries from Christians who identified with the Paradoxical Commandments, so the next book was *Jesus Did It Anyway*. And then my Pastor showed me the amazing final verses

of the Old Testament book of Habakkuk, and the next book was *Have Faith Anyway*. I enjoyed writing those books, and I am truly grateful to all those who helped me along the way.

I had planned to retire in June 2020, and by the time June arrived, the COVID-19 pandemic was upon us, along with government restrictions. We were allowed to walk our dogs each morning, and we occasionally shopped for food, but otherwise we rarely left home. My wife and I taught classes, made presentations, and connected with friends and family members via Zoom.

Working at home, I started sorting through books and papers, thinking that this would be a good time to get better organized. That's when I found the second half of the original manuscript, sitting on a shelf next to some of my other publications. I pulled it out and thumbed through it. It was like finding an old friend. I thoroughly enjoyed expanding and updating it so that I could share it with others.

The introductory chapter lays a foundation for those who are not familiar with the Paradoxical Commandments. Then, for the first time in print, is the rest of the story— how to find meaning in the face of *success*.

Kent M. Keith  
Honolulu  
January 2021

## INTRODUCTION

Finding meaning in life has been important to me since I was a high school student, more than fifty years ago. My search for meaning has shaped my life, and the meaning that I have found has provided me with a strong foundation for deep happiness. The paradox is that I did not find that meaning and deep happiness by achieving the symbols of success that our commercial culture thinks will make us happy.

It all started back in 1965 when I was walking into the awards assembly at the end of my junior year at Roosevelt High School in Honolulu. Looking back, it's a little embarrassing. The fact is that I was overconfident. As I walked into the stadium, I was not wondering if I would get an award, I was only wondering *how many* awards I would get. But part way into the stadium, I realized that I was so happy about what I had done that year, and felt so good about what I had learned and whom I had helped, that I didn't *need* any awards. I just didn't need them. I had already been *rewarded* with the meaning and satisfaction that came from doing what I had done. That meaning and satisfaction were mine, whether or not anybody gave me an award. It was a major breakthrough for me. It was a moment of spiritual liberation and great inner peace. I knew then that if I had the meaning, I didn't have to have the glory.

It was the sixties, a time of conflict and confrontation on many campuses, but also a time filled with hope and high ideals. During my college years, I traveled around the country giving speeches at student council workshops and conferences. I wanted change, too, and I thought we could work together to bring it about.

What I saw, however, was that a lot of young people were going out into the world to bring about change, only to come back, much too soon. They gave up, because the change they sought was not happening, and people did not appreciate what they were trying to do. I told them that they needed to love people, because love is one

of the only motivations that is strong enough to keep you with the people and with the process until change is achieved. I also told them that if they went out into the world to do what they thought was right, and good, and true, then that should give them a lot of meaning and satisfaction, whether anybody appreciated them or not.

In 1968, when I was 19, a college sophomore, I published a short leadership manual for high school student leaders. It was called *The Silent Revolution: Dynamic Leadership in the Student Council*. It was about caring for people and working together to get things done. As part of that little booklet, I wrote what I called the Paradoxical Commandments, to emphasize the need to stay focused on meaning. Here they are:

1. People are illogical, unreasonable, and self-centered.  
*Love them anyway.*
2. If you do good, people will accuse you  
of selfish ulterior motives.  
*Do good anyway.*
3. If you are successful, you will win  
false friends and true enemies.  
*Succeed anyway.*
4. The good you do today will be forgotten tomorrow.  
*Do good anyway.*
5. Honesty and frankness make you vulnerable.  
*Be honest and frank anyway.*
6. The biggest men and women with the biggest  
ideas can be shot down by the smallest men  
and women with the smallest minds.  
*Think big anyway.*

7. People favor underdogs but follow only top dogs.  
*Fight for a few underdogs anyway.*
8. What you spend years building  
may be destroyed overnight.  
*Build anyway.*
9. People really need help but may attack you  
if you do help them.  
*Help people anyway.*
10. Give the world the best you have and you'll  
get kicked in the teeth.  
*Give the world the best you have anyway.*

The Paradoxical Commandments are guidelines for finding personal meaning in the face of adversity. So each one starts with a statement about something that is difficult or adverse. But each statement of adversity is followed by a positive commandment to do the right thing— the meaningful thing— *anyway*.

Times can be tough. But no matter what the world does to us, we get to decide how to *respond*. And we can always respond in a way that is meaningful to us. We can always find meaning by facing the worst in the world with the best in ourselves.

There are things in life we can't control. What we *can* control is our inner lives. We get to decide who we are going to be and how we are going to live. And we *can* live our faith, and we *can* live our values, and we *can* be close to our family and friends, and we *can* do what we know is right, and good, and true, no matter what. *No matter what*. And doing that can always be a source of meaning for us. Even when the world is going badly, we can still find personal meaning.

Over the years, some people have called the Paradoxical Commandments a “personal declaration of independence”—

independence from all the things that we can't control. We can find meaning anyway. Other people refer to the commandments as a "no excuses" policy. Okay, some people are illogical, unreasonable, and self-centered. So what? That's no excuse. You have to love them anyway. You don't want to limit your life by limiting your love.

We sold 25,000 -30,000 copies of that little leadership booklet in the United States between 1968 and 1972. Unknown to me at the time, the commandments spread all over the world, until millions of people had used them. They have been shared by people of all faiths in more than 100 countries. They have been published in hundreds of books, shared in commencement speeches, blogs, and websites. If you type the first Paradoxical Commandment into a search engine, you will get anywhere between 70,000 and 175,000 hits. My website, [www.paradoxicalcommandments.com](http://www.paradoxicalcommandments.com), has had more than a million visitors since we set it up in 2002.

The event that changed my life occurred at a meeting of my Rotary Club in Honolulu in September 1997. The club began its meetings with a poem or prayer or thought for the day. That day, my fellow Rotarian noted that Mother Teresa had passed away two weeks before, and he said he wanted to read a poem that she wrote. I bowed my head to listen, and what he read was eight of the original ten Paradoxical Commandments, exactly as I had written them, thirty years before.

I recognized them. I was calm— I didn't suddenly jump up and say "hey!" But after the meeting, I went up to my fellow Rotarian and I asked him where he got the poem. He said, "Isn't it wonderful?" I said, "Uh, well, actually, I wrote it." He was kind and didn't argue, but he gave me a look. I don't know what that look meant to him, but to me, that look meant, "you poor delusional megalomaniac, claiming to have written something by Mother Teresa!"

I asked him again where he got it. He said it was in a book about Mother Teresa, but he didn't know the name of the book. So

I went to a bookstore and found a whole shelf of books about the life and works of Mother Teresa. I started at the left and went through each book, page by page, until I found it. It was in a book compiled by Lucinda Vardey titled *Mother Teresa: A Simple Path*. The commandments were on the last page before the appendix. The words were reformatted to look like a poem, and were titled “Anyway.” The book did not say that Mother Teresa wrote the commandments. Instead, at the bottom of the page it said: “From a sign on the wall of Shishu Bhavan, the children’s home in Calcutta.”<sup>1</sup>

That was when I learned that Mother Teresa thought that the Paradoxical Commandments were important enough to put up on the wall at her orphanage so that she and the other sisters could look at them from time to time as they ministered to their children. That really hit me. It meant a lot to me because of my respect for the spirituality and work of Mother Teresa. It also meant a lot to me because my wife and I have been in a number of children’s homes, and we know that they can be heart-wrenching places. In fact, we adopted all three of our children from children’s homes in Japan and Romania. Knowing that Mother Teresa put the commandments up on the wall, and it was the wall of her children’s home— well, that really meant a lot to me. I wanted to laugh, and cry, and shout, and jump up and down. I didn’t know what to do.

Eventually, what I decided to do was simple: I started writing and speaking about the Paradoxical Commandments again after thirty years had passed. *The New York Times* called me the Rip Van Winkle of inspirational gurus. I wrote something, then thirty years went by, and I sort of “woke up” to discover that what I wrote had traveled all over the world and been used by millions of people.

The first book that I wrote after I “woke up” was *Anyway: The Paradoxical Commandments*, published by Inner Ocean Publishing in 2001 and then by G. P. Putnam’s Sons in 2002. It became a national bestseller and was translated into 17 languages. Other

books followed: *Do It Anyway* (2003), *Jesus Did It Anyway* (2005), and *Have Faith Anyway* (2008).

As a result of the books I wrote, I started hearing from people all over the world who have used the Paradoxical Commandments in their daily lives. They told me that they have used the commandments to raise their children or get through a difficult time at work. They have looked at them each morning before going to work, to help them stay focused on what is most important in their lives. They have looked at the commandments during times of despair, and each time, the commandments got them going again. I have heard from people who have carried the commandments in their wallets and purses for twenty years. I feel like I am part of a growing network of kindred spirits, and it's a wonderful feeling. I am truly grateful. I set out to inspire people, and now they are inspiring me.

The Paradoxical Commandments point away from popular symbols of success like power, wealth, and fame. Popular symbols of success are not necessarily bad. They just aren't *enough*. They do not provide very much personal meaning, and they do not lead to deep happiness.

That is in itself a paradox. You can become very successful, as our secular society defines success, and still not be deeply happy. To be deeply happy, you have to find personal meaning, and personal meaning is not about power, wealth, and fame.

The Paradoxical Commandments are guidelines for finding personal meaning in the face of adversity. But there is another challenge in life, and that is *finding personal meaning in the face of success*. The lure of "success" is powerful, and it is reinforced, relentlessly, every day in our secular, commercial culture. For that reason, it can be harder to find personal meaning in the face of success than in the face of hardship. The symbols of success are supposed to bring lots of meaning and happiness, but they don't. You have to hold them at bay while focusing on more important

sources of personal meaning.

I was fortunate to discover the importance of personal meaning early in life. The more I learned about the lives of people with power, wealth, and fame, the more hollow those symbols of success appeared. It became clear to me that *the search for success and the search for meaning are not the same search*. In fact, for each symbol of success, there is a very different, often contrasting, way to find more personal meaning than the symbols of success can provide.

My own experience and research have convinced me that, when people sit down to think about it, most of them know where the greatest personal meaning can be found. But knowing is not enough. The challenge is to live that way. And to live that way, most of us need to be reminded and encouraged.

This book is meant to be a gentle reminder and a source of encouragement. I hope that it will inspire you to find and enjoy the immense amount of personal meaning that is right there, waiting for you, every day of your life.

## The Importance of Finding Meaning



The message of the Paradoxical Commandments is that we can always find meaning, no matter what is happening in the world around us. That's good news, because there are many benefits to finding meaning in life and at work.

Unfortunately, not everyone understands these benefits. The importance of finding meaning in life and at work is often overlooked or underestimated. The purpose of this chapter is to explain the significant impact that meaning can have on one's happiness, health, and productivity.

### **Meaning in life: A key to being deeply happy**

I believe that each of us can be, and *should* be, deeply happy. Some people describe happiness as self-actualization, or self-fulfillment, or being centered. Others describe it as living their passion or following their bliss. For people of faith it may be finding the divine will for their lives and then living that will. Researchers may say that happiness is a positive emotional condition, pleasure, or satisfaction with one's life.<sup>2</sup> However it is defined, we know that finding meaning in life is a key to being deeply happy.

In his book *Happiness: Lessons from a New Science*, Richard Layard stated that "people who achieve a sense of meaning in their lives are happier than those who live from one pleasure to another."<sup>3</sup> Layard quoted a study that indicated that other factors that relate to happiness and life satisfaction are autonomy, positive relationships, personal growth, and self-acceptance.

Dennis Prager, in his book *Happiness Is a Serious Problem*, said

that “happiness can be attained under virtually any circumstances providing you believe that your life has meaning and purpose.”<sup>4</sup> Dan Baker and Cameron Stauth, in their book *What Happy People Know*, said that “happy people know why they’re here on earth. They’re doing the things they were meant to do. If they died today, they would be satisfied with their lives.”<sup>5</sup> Daniel M. Hayborn, in his book, *Happiness*, said:

Another crucial part of living well has to do with *meaning*: very roughly, connecting with people and things that matter... We want to pass our lives in meaningful, worthwhile pursuits. We’ve seen that such activities can make us happier.<sup>6</sup>

Tal Ben-Shahar taught a popular course at Harvard on positive psychology. In his book *Happier: Learn the Secrets to Daily Joy and Lasting Fulfillment*, he wrote that happiness is “the overall experience of pleasure and meaning.”<sup>7</sup> Meaning comes from having a sense of purpose. He said:

A happy person enjoys positive emotions while perceiving her life as purposeful. The definition does not pertain to a single moment but to a generalized aggregate of one’s experiences: a person can endure emotional pain at times and still be happy overall...

To live a meaningful life, we must have a self-generated purpose that possesses personal significance rather than one that is dictated by society’s standards and expectations. When we do experience this sense of purpose, we often feel as though we have found our calling. As George Bernard Shaw said, ‘This is the true joy of life, the being used for a purpose recognized by yourself as a mighty one.’<sup>8</sup>

Unfortunately, symbols of success like money and status are not reliable sources of happiness. Daniel Hayborn, in his book *Happiness*, wrote:

Having materialistic values... tends not to make us happier. Studies find that people who place a higher value on money, possessions, and status tend to be less happy. Those with less materialistic values tend to be significantly happier. More broadly, people driven primarily by external rewards like wealth or status tend to be less happy than those who see their pursuits as intrinsically worthwhile, doing them for their own sake.<sup>9</sup>

A study of 800 college alumni found that those who valued high income, job success, and prestige, were twice as likely to be either *fairly unhappy* or *very unhappy* as those who valued having very close friends and a close marriage.<sup>10</sup>

Happiness is not the only benefit to finding meaning. There are other benefits as well. Research has shown that having purpose and meaning in life increases overall well-being and life satisfaction, improves mental and physical health, enhances resiliency, enhances self-esteem, and decreases the chances of depression.

Kenneth W. Thomas, in his book, *Intrinsic Motivation at Work*, said that “there is ... much evidence that people suffer when they lack purpose. Clinical studies show that people deteriorate in various ways without purpose.”<sup>11</sup> Research suggests, in fact, that finding purpose and meaning is a life-or-death issue. It has an impact on the will to live.

Viktor Frankl was a Jewish psychiatrist in Vienna when the Nazis rose to power. He was sent to Nazi labor camps in WWII. The labor camps were tragic places where people were literally worked to death. Frankl observed that those who survived the labor camps were those who had a reason to live— those who still had meaning in their lives.

Based on that experience, Frankl concluded that the primary motivational force in human beings is the drive for meaning. He broke with Freud and Jung, and established logotherapy to focus his clients on finding meaning in their lives. He also wrote a book,

*Man's Search for Meaning*, about his experience in the Nazi labor camps. It is not a happy book, but it is an important book. Ten million copies have been sold in 24 languages. In 1991 a survey by the Library of Congress found it to be one of the ten most influential books in America.

There is more recent research that suggests that Frankl was right. Fifteen years ago, journalists and scholars began sharing information about what they called “Blue Zones.” These are regions of the world where a higher than usual number of people live longer than average. These regions have far more centenarians—people who live to be 100 years old or older. They found Blue Zones in Okinawa, the Greek island of Ikaria, the Italian island of Sardinia, the Nicoya peninsula in northwest Costa Rica, and a Seventh-day Adventist community in Loma Linda, California. According to Dan Buettner, one of the nine factors that support a long, healthy life in these Blue Zones is a sense of purpose. People know why they get up in the morning. They find meaning in the contributions they make to their families and communities.<sup>12</sup>

In 2009 a study was published by Boyle, Barnes, Buchman, and Bennett titled “Purpose in Life Is Associated with Mortality Among Community-Dwelling Older Persons.” The researchers interviewed 1,238 older persons without dementia and categorized them into a group with low meaning in their lives and a group with high meaning in their lives. The study controlled for depression, disability, neurotic personality traits, chronic medical conditions, and income.

The researchers followed the two groups for five years. What they discovered was that those in the low meaning group had a higher risk of mortality. A much larger percentage of them died—in fact, twice as many as the high meaning group. The study suggests that meaning is a life or death issue even in environments far more positive than Frankl found in the Nazi labor camps.

## Meaning at work: A key to high performance

In addition to finding meaning in life, it is important to find meaning at work. Meaning is an intrinsic motivator, and those who are intrinsically motivated perform at higher levels.

We often hear about two major types of motivation, extrinsic and intrinsic. Extrinsic motivation is about what you *have* to do, not what you *want* to do. The task needs to be done, but it is not fun, interesting, fulfilling, or meaningful. Managers therefore offer incentives or threats of punishment to get the task done. They tell people that if you do *this*, you will get *that*. And *that* is a reward not related to the work itself.

Intrinsic motivation is the opposite. It is about what you *want* to do, not what you *have* to do. People are intrinsically motivated when they do something because it *is* fun, interesting, fulfilling, or meaningful. When you are intrinsically motivated, the work itself is your reward. We don't say that if you do *this*, you will get *that*. We say that if you do *this*, you will like it. You will find it fun or meaningful.

Edward L. Deci wrote a book titled *Why We Do What We Do: Understanding Self Motivation*. The book included a report on a study done on six types of life aspirations. Three were extrinsic—the aspiration to be wealthy, famous, and physically attractive. The other three were intrinsic—the aspiration to have meaningful personal relationships, to make contributions to the community, and to grow as an individual. Deci said:

...[S]trong aspirations for any of the intrinsic goals... were positively associated with well-being. People who strongly desired to contribute to their community, for example, had more vitality and higher self-esteem. When people organize their behavior in terms of intrinsic strivings (relative to extrinsic strivings) they seem more content—they feel better about who they are and display more evidence of psychological health.<sup>13</sup>

In addition to psychological health, research suggests that intrinsic motivation can lead to higher levels of performance in the workplace. In his research, Dr. Kenneth W. Thomas identified a sense of meaning as an important intrinsic reward at work.<sup>14</sup> Common sense tells us that if you find meaning in your work and you are intrinsically motivated, you will be able to do more, and do it better, for longer.

Dr. Adam Grant, a professor at the Wharton School, explored this issue in his research. He separated prosocial motivation and intrinsic motivation to study their effects on each other. He defined prosocial motivation as the desire to benefit or help others— to serve a greater purpose. He said that intrinsic motivation comes from interest in the work or the enjoyment of doing the work.

Dr. Grant studied 140 workers at a telephone call center and 58 employees at a fire department. He focused on the issues of persistence, performance, and productivity. Grant concluded that employees display higher levels of persistence, performance, and productivity when they experience prosocial motivation and intrinsic motivation together— when they have the desire to serve a greater purpose, and they find meaning in their work.<sup>15</sup>

Just how important is meaning at work? Catherine Bailey and Adrian Madden interviewed 135 people in the United Kingdom who work in a variety of occupations. They published their results in an article in the *MIT Sloan Management Review* titled “What Makes Work Meaningful—Or Meaningless.” They said that the research shows that meaningfulness is more important to employees than any other aspect of work. It is more important to employees than pay and rewards, opportunities for promotion, or working conditions.<sup>16</sup>

Bailey and Madden agreed with Grant’s findings. They said that meaningful work can be highly motivational, leading to improved employee performance. It can also lead to greater commitment and satisfaction.

One leader who focused on purpose and meaning as a way of lifting her colleagues and her company was Cheryl Bachelder. Bachelder was the CEO of Popeyes Louisiana Kitchen from 2007 to 2017. The restaurant chain had \$2.4 billion in sales and 2,187 restaurants in 27 countries. Sales and profits had been declining for years. But six years after Bachelder assumed leadership, sales had climbed 25%, market share had grown from 14% to 21%, profitability was up by 40%, and the stock price was up 450%. The improvement was dramatic.

In her book, *Dare to Serve*, Bachelder said that one important step she took was to invite the company's leaders to develop a personal purpose that gave meaning to their work. She said that it was the leader's responsibility to bring purpose and meaning to the work of the organization. Popeyes conducted workshops that took team members through several exercises regarding their life experiences, values, strengths, and action plans. Bachelder said that the leaders at Popeyes who had an action plan for their personal purpose were having more impact on the business. She believes that personal purpose leads to sustained superior performance.<sup>17</sup>

In summary, finding meaning has many benefits in life and at work. It is a key to being deeply happy. It can impact our mental and physical health, and even how long we live. It makes a difference at work, because those who find meaning at work are intrinsically motivated and perform at higher levels.

### **Sources of meaning in life**

Unfortunately, according to the Center for Disease Control, about 40 percent of Americans have not discovered a satisfying life purpose. Forty percent either do not think their lives have a clear sense of purpose or are neutral about whether their lives have purpose. Nearly a quarter of Americans do not have a strong sense of what makes their lives meaningful. This is really sad, because it doesn't have to be this way.

Over the years, I have conducted non-random surveys of people in the United States, asking them to rate about 30 different potential sources of meaning in their lives. I have surveyed college students, Rotarians, lawyers, high school teachers, land developers, and U.S. Army officers. After surveying the first 30 groups, I had collected about 3,500 surveys. I then did a simple analysis of the results. The sources of meaning that received the highest numerical ratings were:

- family
- giving and receiving love
- intimate relationships
- living my values
- doing my personal best
- a sense of accomplishment.

Those are wonderful sources of meaning that are available to almost everyone. The high ratings for family, giving and receiving love, and intimate relationships are not a surprise. As Terry Eagleton wrote in *The Meaning of Life*: “For most people, in practice if not always in theory, life is made meaningful by their relationships with those closest to them, such as partners and children.”<sup>18</sup>

In the same surveys, the *lowest*-rated sources of meaning were:

- wealth
- power
- winning
- fame

These are symbols of success in our culture. People measure our success by our wealth, power, ability to win, and fame. But when surveyed, people have repeatedly given these symbols of success low ratings as sources of meaning. My interpretation is that the people I surveyed are not *against* achieving these symbols of success, they just don't see them as important sources of meaning in their lives.

I think there are four sources of meaning that are universal—

that cut across countries, cultures, and centuries:

- love people
- help people
- live ethically
- don't be too attached to material things

I don't know if there is a causal connection between these sources of meaning, but it would make sense to me if there were. When you love people, you usually want to help them. And when you are loving and helping people, you want to be ethical and treat them right. And if you are loving and helping people and treating them right, you are probably more focused on people and are not too attached to things. So I can see how these four sources of meaning might be causally related.

When I have shared these four sources of meaning with others, I have been asked if I can get it down to just *two* sources of meaning. If I had to pick just two, they would be:

- focus on others, not yourself— which includes loving and helping others and treating them ethically; and
- become part of something larger than yourself— something that will have a bigger impact than you can have alone, like a family, organization, community, or movement.

Occasionally, I have been asked if I could get it down to just *one* thing. If I had to pick one thing, it would be *love*, in all its dimensions and relationships. But if someone came to me and said he had little meaning in his life, I would not give him one word, I would give him three words: *Go help somebody*. Get out of yourself, focus on others, and the meaning will come.

Each of us will find his or her own meaning. When we do, it will probably not be any of the symbols of success. It will probably be one or more of the “Meaning Maximizers.” Let's take a look...

## The Meaning Maximizers



It's a crazy world. Our culture says that we should strive for the kind of success that brings us very little personal meaning. We can be very “successful” people and yet have some troubling questions: What does it all mean? What is it all for? Why am I living this way? And why does it feel so empty?

In the media, in our daily conversations, in our evaluation of each other, we define success in terms of symbols of success like power, wealth, fame, prestige, and social status. We do that regularly, even though we know that people who have all those things are not necessarily happy. Their lives may be less meaningful than the lives of people who *don't* have any of those symbols of success.

Many of us are fascinated by people who have power. We tend to ignore the way they use power for their own purposes, not for the good of their organizations and communities. And we tend to overlook the ways in which those people become addicted to power, and often lead empty, even tormented lives.

Many of us also dream of our moment of fame, and yet those who are famous do not necessarily find life worth living. Anthony Bourdain was a famous travel and food writer who starred in a number of television programs. Ernest Hemingway was a famous and respected writer who won both the Pulitzer Prize and the Nobel Prize for his novels. Robin Williams was a highly successful actor and one of the greatest comedians of all time. Kate Spade was a well-known fashion designer and entrepreneur. Each of them died by suicide. Fame does not protect people from depression or other serious health issues.

When asked what we would like more of, most of us say “money.” And yet research shows that people who are rich are not especially happier than people with only modest amounts of money.<sup>19</sup>

We push our kids to succeed early in life so that they will be likely to gain power, wealth, and fame in the future. We want them to get high grades and test scores in school, and we want them to be winners in athletic competitions and student body elections, because those are stepping stones to getting into the most prestigious colleges and universities. We want our children to get into those institutions, even if a less prestigious one might be a better match for their talents and needs.

After graduation, we want our children to move into careers that will give them power, wealth, and fame, even if other careers would give them far more meaning and satisfaction. We measure the success of their careers in terms of pay and prestige, not in terms of their contributions to society, the difference they make in the lives of others, or the personal happiness that their careers might bring them.

I am grateful that my parents were not focused on symbols of success. They did not push me toward attending prestigious schools or pursuing high-status careers. They just wanted me to be the best I could be, whatever I set out to do. Unfortunately, I have talked with many young people, in more than one country, who are not as fortunate. Their parents want them to have power and prestige, because they think that that will make their children happy. But their children have hearts and talents for meaningful work that will make them happy without the symbols of success. This can create a lot of conflict between parents and children—conflict that can last for many years. It is really sad, because the symbols of success that many parents want for their children will not provide them with much happiness.

Between the 1960s and the 1990s, Americans achieved a lot of “success.” The average disposable income of Americans doubled.

We earned more, ate more expensive food, had more expensive homes, more of us went to college, and we lived longer. Our material world improved substantially.

But as Meyers points out in his book, *The American Paradox*, for all the materialistic improvements, research showed that we were not much happier, and we were experiencing a marked decline in our spiritual lives. The divorce rate doubled and the teen suicide rate tripled. Four times more violent crimes were reported, and five times more people were in prison. Depression increased by as much as ten times compared with levels before World War II.<sup>20</sup> Meyers concluded that “our becoming much better off... has not been accompanied by one iota of increased psychological well-being.”<sup>21</sup> Gregg Easterbrook, in *The Progress Paradox*, agreed. He noted:

... Just about every objective indicator of social welfare has trended upward on a pretty much uninterrupted basis for two generations... But your graphs would lose their skyward direction when the topics turned to the inner self. The trend line for happiness has been flat for fifty years. The trend line is negative for the number of people who consider themselves ‘very happy,’ that percentage gradually declining since the 1940s.<sup>22</sup>

Easterbrook concluded that Americans have more of everything except happiness.

We continue to act and talk as though “success” will make us happy, when all the evidence around us suggests that that is not where the deepest happiness is to be found. We are a society that pushes for success without meaning. It’s a crazy world.

Since the world is crazy, the way to find personal meaning is to be a contrarian— to *not* to look for meaning in the things the world emphasizes as symbols of success. You will find it instead in the values, ideas, and ways of life that I call “Meaning Maximizers.”

## The Paradox of Personal Meaning

*Symbol of “Success” < Meaning Maximizer*

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Cynicism	<	Values
Infatuation	<	Love
Individualism	<	Community
Fame	<	Intimacy
Wealth	<	Richness of Life
Power	<	Service
Winning	<	Personal Best
Appearance	<	Health
Job	<	Mission
Artificial	<	Natural
Information	<	Wisdom

---

The column on the left is a list of things that our commercial, secular society considers to be the attributes of success or successful people. To increase our personal meaning, we have to shift our attention from the column on the left to the column on the right. We have to shift our focus from cynicism to values, infatuation to love, individualism to community, fame to intimacy, wealth to the richness of life, power to service, winning to one's personal best, appearance to health, job to mission, artificial to natural, and information to wisdom.

The attributes listed in the left column under “success” are not necessarily bad— they just *aren't enough*. They aren't enough for a meaningful life. That's why I use the “less than” sign or “<.” The world's symbols of success provide less meaning than the Meaning Maximizers.

To put it another way, you don't have to give up the world's idea of success. Personally, I don't get up every morning and rush out into the world to fail. I work hard and I do my best. When you do your best, you may be successful as our society defines it. That's fine. You don't have to give up power, wealth, fame, and other symbols of “success.” You just need to know where to find personal meaning and stay focused on those things. The goal is not self-denial, but self-fulfillment.

The search for meaning and the search for “success” can overlap. Sometimes you will have “success” *with* meaning. But you will only be happy and healthy if you find personal meaning. In this book you will discover— or rediscover— how shifting your focus to the Meaning Maximizers will help you to find *more* personal meaning in a crazy world.

Now it's time to take a closer look at those symbols of success and compare them with the Meaning Maximizers.

## Cynicism < Values

**It is more meaningful to build a life on values  
than to build a life on nothing.**

“Successful” people are often worldly, jaded, suspicious, and cynical. They no longer believe what “less successful” people believe. They have seen it all, and they are above it all.

In *The Last Battle*, the final book of the Narnia series, C. S. Lewis described the end of Narnia and the beginning of life in a *new* Narnia, Aslan’s Country, which is a metaphor for heaven. All the people and animals were invited through the door to heaven, but one group wouldn’t go. They sat on the ground, close together in a circle, facing each other. Instead of seeing the sky, trees, and flowers around them, they believed they were in a crowded, pitch-black, smelly stable. When one member of the group was handed fresh violets, he thought the violets were stable-litter. When the group was given a glorious feast of pies and trifles and ices, they were convinced that they were eating hay, an old turnip, and a raw cabbage leaf. They were given wine, and they thought it was dirty water from a donkey’s trough. They fought over the food scraps, and then declared: “Well, at any rate there’s no Humbug here. We haven’t let anyone take us in.”<sup>23</sup>

They were so concerned about “not being taken in” that they could not see the beauty or taste the treats that were all around them. Aslan, the lion who is the king and creator of Narnia, explained to the others: “They have chosen cunning instead of belief. Their prison is only in their own minds, yet they are in that prison; and so afraid of being taken in that they cannot be taken out.”<sup>24</sup> There was no way to help them. They were too cynical to see beauty or accept heaven.

That passage from *The Last Battle* reminds me of a lot of cynics I have met during my life. I have always felt sorry for them. I have always wished there was a way to help them see beyond the negative self-fulfilling prophecies that kept them from being happy.

A cynic has been defined as someone who knows the cost of everything and the value of nothing. Cynics are faultfinding critics. They believe that what appears to be true is probably false; what seems good is probably not. They expect the worst and seem vindicated when the worst happens.

To some people, cynicism seems “safe.” A cynic doesn’t stick his neck out. He doesn’t take a stand. He doesn’t put his heart and soul into doing something. He doesn’t risk anything. Cynicism can thus be an excuse for not making commitments, for not taking action. Frankly, it can be an excuse for *not living*. That is why cynicism is empty. It leads nowhere. It gives you nothing to build on. It’s not a plan of action.

In some circles, cynicism is considered “sophisticated” because it is thought to be a mature understanding of reality and the corruptions of the world. To a cynic, a person who stands up and says that she or he wants to do what is right is naïve. A person who wants to do the most loving thing is a hopeless romantic. A person who wants to do the honorable thing is full of some old nonsense found in novels about Medieval knights. A person who argues for what is beautiful is dismissed as an effete intellectual snob. A person who argues for compassion and understanding is deemed to be weak and mushy. A person who asserts that we are all children of God is a religious fanatic. And so it goes— in the eyes of the cynic.

Cynics often mock value-based behavior. They do not understand the deep personal meaning that can come from living one’s values. “Living my values” was one of the highest-rated sources of meaning in the surveys I conducted.

Values are central to the human heritage. In many ways, values *are* the human heritage. They embody the cumulative wisdom of those who have gone before us. Fundamental human values include love, truth, faith, hope, loyalty, beauty, belonging, honesty, responsibility, fairness, goodness, service, justice, compassion,

courage, commitment, honor, respect, discipline, and duty. Our values define us and influence our actions.

Honesty is a value that influenced the actions of a character in the movie *The Legend of Bagger Vance* starring Will Smith, Matt Damon, and Charlize Theron. The story is set in Georgia in 1931, during the depression. It featured an exhibition match between golf greats Bobby Jones and Walter Hagen. Rannulph Junuh, a favorite son and one-time reputable golfer, was added for local interest. Junuh was a hero in World War I who was traumatized by the war and returned home a broken-down alcoholic. Bagger Vance showed up mysteriously one night to serve as Junuh's caddy and help Junuh to find himself— and his “authentic swing.”

Junuh had the chance to win the game on the final hole. Then his ball moved when he removed an impediment that the ball was sitting on. Junuh and a young boy, Greaves, were the only ones who saw the ball move. According to the rules of golf, each time a ball moves it is counted as a stroke, even if the ball moves very little, by accident, without being hit by a club.

Greaves told Junuh that nobody will know that the ball moved. Junuh says no, *I* will know. Honesty was one of his values, so he called a penalty stroke on himself, giving up his chance to win. That was when Bagger Vance knew that Junuh was okay, and no longer needed his help. He disappeared as mysteriously as he came. The game ended in a happy three-way tie between Jones, Hagen, and Junuh.

Another example of values is found in the movie *Argo*, starring Ben Affleck. It is based on the true story of the storming of the United States embassy in Tehran on November 4, 1979, by Iranian revolutionaries. More than fifty American embassy staff members were taken as hostages, but six escaped and hid in the home of the Canadian ambassador, Ken Taylor. With the situation kept secret, the U.S. State Department began to explore options for getting the six escaped staff members out of Iran.

Tony Mendez, a U.S. Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) exfiltration specialist, was brought in for consultation. He created a cover story that could be used to rescue the six embassy staff members. The cover story was that the staff members were Canadian filmmakers in Iran scouting exotic locations for a science-fiction film titled *Argo*. The cover story was adopted by the CIA as their “best bad idea.”

Posing as a producer for *Argo*, Mendez entered Iran and linked up with the six staff members. He provided them with Canadian passports and fake identities to prepare them to get through security at the airport when they flew out. Although afraid to trust Mendez’ scheme, they reluctantly went along with it, knowing that he was risking his own life too. Mendez drilled them on their new identities, rehearsing with them their fake backgrounds and roles as movie-makers.

The night before Mendez and the staff members were set to leave Iran, Mendez was told that the operation was cancelled. It conflicted with a new plan to mount a military rescue of the fifty hostages being held at the U.S. embassy. He was told to come home and leave the six staff members who were hiding at the home of the Canadian ambassador. Mendez stayed awake all night, unable to sleep, trying to decide what to do.

For Mendez, it came down to one value: responsibility. Against orders, Mendez decided to bring the six staff members out of Iran using the cover story. Before leaving for the airport, he called his boss, Jack, back in Washington. “Somebody’s responsible when things happen, Jack. I’m responsible. I’m taking them through.” In both real life and the movie, he succeeded. They made it home.

Values have been important to human beings since the beginning of recorded history. But values are not important just because they are old. They are important because they contain wisdom about meeting human needs.

For example, babies are helpless when they are born. They will not grow and become contributing members of society unless their parents love them and provide them with physical affection, food, clothing, shelter, and education. Caring for children is an important value that grows out of the very practical need for the survival of the species.

Loyalty and commitment are also important values. Families and friends who are loyal and committed to each other nurture and protect each other. People need that nurturing and protection throughout their lives.

Since civilizations were first established, the division of labor has meant that people depend on each other for their food, clothing, shelter, tools, education, and worship. Because of this interdependence, values such as responsibility and reliability are important. Also, when people make decisions that affect themselves and their families, they need information. They need to be able to rely on what others tell them. Honesty is an important value.

Societies and individuals face obstacles and hardships. That's why courage, faith, and hope are such important values. People also need to belong, and they want to be respected for their contributions. They want to be treated fairly, and with sympathy. Belonging, respect, justice, and compassion are important values.

Some values are aesthetic or spiritual, responding to deeper human needs. Some people see these as ultimate values. All over the world, billions of people value their religious faith. Their faith helps them to understand the divine, provides them with guidance on how to live, and gives them meaning and purpose in their daily lives.

Values have grown up in response to fundamental human needs, and they remind us of what those needs are. Focusing on values helps people to meet their own fundamental needs as well as

the needs of others. That's one way in which values help to hold societies together. Values help us organize our lives and move society forward in a humane way. They keep us moving toward fulfillment as individuals and as communities.

A cynical world is a tough environment in which to live your values. The only thing tougher is to live *without* values. The choice is to build a life on values, or to build a life on nothing. Cynicism leads nowhere. Values lead to a humane and meaningful life.

*It is more meaningful to build a life on values than to build a life on nothing.*

## Infatuation < Love

**It is more meaningful to enjoy a love that lasts forever than to seek infatuations that flame and die.**

Some people think that success is demonstrated through various forms of infatuation— a passion or admiration for someone or something. It may be infatuation with clothing, restaurants, cars, friends, or lovers. Whatever it is, the highs are really high and the lows are really low. When one intense infatuation fades, the search is on for the next one, because the lives of “successful” people must be perpetually exciting and dramatic. They must always be infatuated with *something*.

Unfortunately, some people confuse romantic infatuation with love. Perhaps that is because the delirious life of infatuation is the way that love is portrayed in many movies, books, poems, and stories. If you are *not* having this kind of frenetic, heart-pounding relationship— well, popular culture suggests that you aren’t really in love. But popular culture is wrong.

Romantic infatuation is not necessarily a bad thing. After all, infatuation can bring people together. However, infatuation can be shallow. The partners may know very little about each other. Each may be in love with an *image* of the other. Some couples who are infatuated are more in love with love than with their partners. They are infatuated with the *idea* of being in love. It is not surprising that a life of infatuation is hard to sustain, and often lasts for only a short time. It flames and then dies.

Fortunately, a romantic infatuation can be transformed. It can lead to a loving relationship based on mutual knowledge and affection. Love is much more than infatuation. Love is deeper. Love is forever.

I believe that love is a decision. It’s a decision to be fully

committed to those you love. It's a commitment to the relationship, a commitment to devote the time and attention to make the relationship meaningful and joyful. It's a commitment to work on challenges and work out problems as they arise. It is this commitment to the relationship that results in a love that grows over time.

The most delightful fantasy-adventure-romance-fairy tale that I have ever seen is the movie *Stardust* starring Claire Danes, Charlie Cox, Michelle Pfeiffer, and Robert De Niro. The story takes place in the English village of Wall and the magical kingdom of Stormhold. Wall and Stormhold are located next to each other, but they are separated by a wall that the residents of Wall are forbidden to cross.

The dying king of Stormhold had a number of sons. He declared that whichever one found the ruby that he tossed into the sky will be the next king. When he tossed the ruby into the sky, it traveled into space and hit a star, which fell to earth at Stormhold.

The falling star was seen by Tristan, a young man who lived in Wall. He was infatuated with Victoria, a girl who lived in his village and was not very interested in him. To win her hand in marriage, he set out to capture a piece of the falling star and bring it back to Victoria. She agreed that if he could do that before her birthday, she will marry him.

Using a Babylon candle to magically transport himself into Stormhold, Tristan discovered that the falling star was a beautiful young woman named Yvaine. He captured her to take her back to Victoria. There were, of course, many adventures along the way, as princes and witches sought to capture Yvaine for their own purposes. During these adventures, Tristan grew up, and he and Yvaine gradually fell in love.

Yvaine professed her love to Tristan at a memorable moment. A witch who agreed to take them back to Stormhold in her wagon

turned Tristan into a mouse and put him into a small cage for safekeeping during the trip. The witch could not see Yvaine, who rode inside the wagon and said this to mouse Tristan:

You know when I said I knew little about love, that wasn't true. I know a lot about love. I've seen it, seen centuries and centuries of it. It was the only thing that made watching your world bearable. All those wars, pain, lies, and hate made me want to turn away and never look down again. But to see the way that mankind loves, you could search the farthest reaches of the universe and never find anything more beautiful. So, yes, I know that love is unconditional. But I also know it can be unpredictable, unexpected, uncontrollable, unbearable, and strangely easy to mistake for loathing. What I am trying to say, Tristan, is I think I love you! My heart, it feels like my chest can barely contain it, like it doesn't belong to me anymore, it belongs to you. And if you wanted it, I would wish for nothing in exchange, no gift, no goods, no demonstrations of devotion, nothing but knowing that you loved me, too. Just your heart in exchange for mine.

Tristan may have been reduced to mousehood, but he heard what Yvaine said, and realized that he was in love with her, too. This new love, which grew through shared perils and experiences, replaced Tristan's infatuation with Victoria. Tristan returned briefly to Victoria to tell her he could not marry her, and suggest, a bit rudely, that she should grow up. Together, Tristan and Yvaine fought the final battle against the princes and witches, with a happy ending that— well, I don't want to spoil it for you. Watch the movie!

There are many ways to express love. It can be expressed through words, through thoughtful and attentive acts, through gifts of flowers and food and works of art, through playful hugs and kisses, and through sexual union.

Sadly, our commercial culture heavily emphasizes sex, not love.

Sex is often glorified on TV, in the movies, in magazines and social media. We read that more couples are having sex before marriage, and more people are having sex outside of their marriages.

Sex without love and commitment is not deeply meaningful. And when sex becomes an obsession, like an obsession with food, or drink, or drugs, it leads away from happiness, not toward it. It is love that gives meaning to sex and makes it beautiful and intimate. It is love that makes sexual union a spiritual experience. You can't "make love" if you aren't *in* love. Making love and having sex just aren't the same thing.

What is love? According to Webster, it is a strong affection for another, the tenderness felt by lovers, and affection based on admiration, benevolence, or common interests.

There are many kinds of love, reflecting many kinds of loving relationships. For example, in his book, *The Four Loves*, C. S. Lewis discusses four different kinds of love: (1) affection or *storge*, especially among family members; (2) friendship; (3) *eros*, or being in love, including the sexual expression of love; and (4) charity or *agape*, selfless, unconditional love, including love for all humankind.<sup>25</sup>

Perhaps the most famous description of love, recited at many weddings, is the passage in 1 Corinthians 13, where Paul wrote:

Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It does not dishonor others, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres.

I believe that we are designed to run on love. When we love others, we become our best. We are more giving, more caring,

more patient, more kind. We become a gift to others. If we do not love others, we are not who we are supposed to be; we are not all that we can be; we are not doing what we were born to do.

Love heals. Love breaks down barriers. Love can lead to forgiveness and understanding. It can generate joyful acts of giving and helping. Unconditional love holds our families and communities together. It is a gift that doesn't depend on approval or worthiness. It is one of the most amazing, beautiful things in our universe.

Our literature and art are replete with stories of lovers, families, and friends who share their love for each other and experience the joys and sorrows, sacrifices and pleasures that are part of that love. Love stories are among our very favorite stories, even when they are about the pain of unrequited love or the loss of loved ones. These stories mean something to us. They touch us deeply.

In the surveys I conducted, "giving and receiving love" rated very high as a source of personal meaning. I believe that in most countries, cultures, and centuries, people have discovered that love gives life its deepest meaning. Thornton Wilder wrote that love is "the only survival, the only meaning." The American poet Emily Dickinson said that "love is all there is." The Roman poet Virgil said that "Love conquers all things; let us too surrender to Love." Gandhi said simply: "Where there is love there is life." A life without love is a hollow one.

Happy people are people who know how to give and receive love. For most people, that is the most profound, exhilarating meaning of life. Your life may have many purposes, but this is likely to be where you will find the most personal meaning: Love.

*It is more meaningful to enjoy a love that lasts forever than to seek infatuations that flame and die.*

## Individualism < Community

**It is more meaningful to be part of a community than to be individualistic and lonely.**

We value individualism in the United States. Each of us is unique, and each of us has value. Each of us should have the freedom to make our own choices and shape our own lives with minimal interference from others. The Bill of Rights makes it clear that our government should not interfere with individual rights such as the freedom of speech, the freedom to practice our religion, freedom of the press, and the freedom to assemble. We praise individuals who have changed our world through their courage, their ideas, their inventions. We all benefit when individuals stand up and show us a better way.

“Successful” people are often strong individuals. Some of these strong individuals give themselves credit for their own success. “I did it myself,” they say. “I worked hard and overcame obstacles, and today I am successful.” We hear the expression “the self-made man.” We talk about “rugged individualists.” We admire strong individuals.

As a matter of fact, however, nobody succeeds alone. We all depend on others, day after day. We depend on others to grow and deliver our food, make our clothes, build our homes, manufacture our cars, educate us, provide our internet service, entertain us, and heal us when we are sick. We can be individually strong and creative, but we live in a world in which we are more “interdependent” than “independent.”

Individuals thrive in strong communities. That is why we need *both* strong individuals and strong communities. Strong communities nurture the strong individuals who can in turn advance the community. So while we want individuals to have rights, communities also need rights. In a democracy, those rights are exercised by the majority of citizens. The majority has the right

to protect and meet the needs of the community. In exercising its rights, the community should not trample on individuals. Individuals may in fact be able to provide valuable ideas about how to move forward.

While we need both strong individuals and strong communities, there is more meaning available to us by participating in community than by being individualistic and lonely. The meaning comes from belonging to a family, group, neighborhood, or organization.

What is a community? One dictionary definition is that it is a group of people who live in the same place, under the same government, with a common cultural and historical heritage. Another definition is that it is a group of people with common characteristics or interests who perceive themselves to be distinct in some way from the larger society.

The word “community” no doubt means different things to different people. A century or two ago, it may have been primarily geographic—a town or village. When my parents were growing up, their communities consisted of people who lived in the same neighborhood, shopped at the same stores, worshipped at the same churches or synagogues, and sent their children to the same schools. They knew each other. In fact, they knew *a lot* about each other. They were with each other every day.

Sociologists have argued that people lose connections to their neighborhoods as their societies modernize and become more urban. The loss of connection to the neighborhood is seen as harmful to children and families. There is excessive individualism, alienation, and a lower quality of life. Selfishness and greed grow, while civic commitment declines. People seem to feel less responsibility for the society in which they live.

My experience is that today, people who live in the same neighborhood may not know each other at all. They may travel

away from home to shop at stores in other places, or just order online; worship at churches, synagogues, or mosques outside the neighborhood; and send their children to a variety of public or private schools, some a long drive or bus ride away from home.

However, instead of a geographic community, people today may belong to many non-geographic communities, such as their colleagues at work, the families they meet at their children's soccer practice, the people at their place of worship, or people with whom they share a hobby or special interest. Their communities may be based on their activities, not where their homes are located.

What is important is that people *belong*. What is important is interpersonal relationships, knowing and being known, sharing life together. We need productive and meaningful ways to be connected. Aristotle described us as social animals. It is in our relationships with others that we become fully human.

Is there an optimum size for a community? The answer depends on the social, economic, and religious environment. One hundred fifty may have been the typical size of early human communities, while modern hunter-gatherer societies are closer to 500 individuals. One hundred fifty was the average village size recorded in the Domesday Book, which was a record of the "Great Survey" of much of England and Wales in 1086. Village size in England was about the same 700 years later. In the military, a company of soldiers is usually in the 120-180 person range. In the 1980s, when educators in America were proposing that smaller schools be created within large ones in order to create a greater sense of community, they recommended that the smaller schools serve 300 students.

However, the most common answer to the question is 150 people. It is known as Dunbar's Number, which is thought to be the number of people with whom one person can maintain stable social relationships. Those social relationships would be ones in which each person knows each of the other people in the group,

and how each of those people relate to each other. It was proposed by Robin Dunbar, a British anthropologist, who saw a correlation between primate brain size and social group size. Applying what he learned about primates to humans, he suggested that humans can comfortably maintain 150 stable relationships. That would be the number if you only count the people you really know and with whom you have a reciprocal relationship— the people you are willing to help out, and who would be willing to help you out.

In my experience, even in big cities there are neighborhoods that are communities. In the early 1970s, I lived in Tokyo, which currently has 37 million inhabitants and is considered the largest city in the world. I lived in northern Shibuya-ku, only a 20-minute walk from Shinjuku Station, the busiest train station in the world, serving millions of people each day.

In the midst of this huge, busy city, I lived in a small, charming residential neighborhood consisting mostly of two-story homes and three-story apartment buildings. Only a few steps away from my door was a neighborhood market. There were small shops that sold fresh poultry and fish, fruits and vegetables, office supplies, and household goods. There was a pharmacy, a flower shop, and a store that sold *tofu* (coagulated soy milk curds formed into solid white blocks). Most families bought their food around 4:00 pm, took it home, and cooked it for dinner that night— about as fresh as you can get. The neighborhood market was a really convenient place to shop and see your neighbors on a daily basis.

More recently, my wife and I lived in Singapore, one of the most densely populated countries in the world, known for row after row of concrete high-rise apartments. But on the ground level of many of those apartment complexes, there were neighborhood shops and food courts, offering an amazing array of options at very reasonable prices. We didn't have to get on a train or take a taxi to go to a shopping center. The neighborhood centers were low-key, but everything we needed was there, within walking distance of our apartment. By repeated visits, we began to

recognize people, and they began to recognize us. It began to feel like a community.

Ann Hidalgo, who became the Mayor of Paris in 2014, seems to like this idea of local neighborhoods within a large city. She believes that every resident of Paris should be able to meet their essential needs within a short walk or bike ride that would take only 15 minutes. She would like to see each section of the city more self-sufficient, with its own grocery shops, parks, cafes, sports and health facilities, schools and workplaces. Her goal is to transform Paris into a series of neighborhoods. The result would be fewer cars, fewer riders on the subway, less pollution, less stress, and a higher quality of life for residents and visitors. Another result could be more people who know each other and share a sense of community.

Communities provide “social inclusion,” which turns out to be important to human health, especially the health of older people. Of course, one can spend time alone without being lonely. But we need human connections for health and survival. Loneliness has been associated with heart disease, high blood pressure, stroke, dementia, depression, and anxiety.

Earlier I mentioned “Blue Zones,” regions of the world where a higher than usual number of people live longer than average. According to Dan Buettner, three of the nine factors that support a long, healthy life are:

- belonging (participating in a spiritual community);
- loved ones first (making family a priority); and
- the right tribe (being surrounded by those who share Blue Zone values).<sup>26</sup>

Healthy people practice spirituality, and are engaged with their families and communities.

Marta Zaraska wrote a book titled *Growing Young: How Friendship, Optimism, and Kindness Can Help You Live to 100*. Her book is based on hundreds of research papers and on interviews with dozens of scientists. In an interview based on her book, she was asked about the most important factors for increasing healthy life expectancy. She said:

Number one would be a happy, committed romantic relationship— being in one of those can lower your mortality risk by about 49 percent. A good marriage can stave off cancer, diabetes, heart disease, the flu— the list goes on. Not only does it calm our stress response and the HPA axis— our fight-or-flight response, it can also boost the release of health-relevant social hormones, such as oxytocin, endorphins, serotonin. Number two would be your general social connectedness: so the quality of your friendships, how well you know your neighbours, how well you get on with your colleagues at work, etc. All this taken together can lower your mortality risk by about 45 percent.<sup>27</sup>

In 2018, British Prime Minister Theresa May appointed the United Kingdom's first "Minister for Loneliness." It was reported that as many as 9 million people in the U.K. call themselves lonely, and roughly 200,000 older people said they haven't spoken with a friend or relative in over a month.

A British government commission report said that loneliness was a social epidemic. According to the report, feeling lonely was as harmful to your health as smoking 15 cigarettes a day. And although loneliness most often impacts the elderly, people of all ages are affected.

A survey conducted in 2010 by the American Association of Retired People found that 35% of adults age 45 and older reported being lonely. Extrapolating to the national population, that would be 42.6 million adults over age 45 in the United States who were suffering from chronic loneliness. According to research presented

in 2017 at the annual convention of the American Psychological Association, loneliness is now seen to pose more of a public health threat than obesity.<sup>28</sup>

Unfortunately, smartphones and screen devices are making the situation worse for young people. Dr. Jean M. Twenge reviewed generations of data for her book, *iGen*, about the internet generation— those born in 1995 or later. She found that teens who spend more time on screen activities are more likely to be unhappy and lonely. She also found that they are 35% more likely to have at least one suicide risk factor. Data show that 46% more teens killed themselves in 2015 than in 2007 when smartphones first saturated the market.<sup>29</sup>

Our place of work can be a community. In his book, *Concept of the Corporation*, Peter Drucker argued that the corporation’s “social function as a community is as important as its economic function as an efficient producer.”<sup>30</sup> Henry Mintzberg agrees, arguing that the loss of community within companies is a crisis. He wrote:

We are social animals who cannot function effectively without a social system that is larger than ourselves. This is what is meant by ‘community’— the social glue that binds us together for the greater good... Community means caring about our work, our colleagues, and our place in the world, geographic and otherwise, and in turn being inspired by this caring.<sup>31</sup>

In 2017, U.S. Surgeon General Vivek H. Murthy pointed to a lack of social connections in the workplace as a contributing factor in the loneliness epidemic. He said that rates of loneliness have doubled since the 1980s. A mobile society, combined with telecommuting, remote jobs and other work trends, have contributed to the problem. He said face-to-face social interactions are key to feeling happier and more content.<sup>32</sup>

Easterbrook, in his book *The Progress Paradox*, reported:

Research... has shown that human beings are happiest around other people. The Harvard University researcher Edward O. Wilson has called this the ‘biophilia’ hypothesis— that living things yearn for proximity to other living things, which in the case of *Homo sapiens* means people need close connections to other people... On the whole, married people are happier than singles, people in large families are happier than those in small families, those who are busy and attend lots of events where they interact with other people are happier than those who hang around the house.<sup>33</sup>

Research also suggests that chemically, our brains need closeness with other humans as part of the stimuli that make our brains function better.

Being part of a community can give our daily lives meaning, because we *belong*. Our lives can be enriched by others, as we in turn enrich theirs. We can love and be loved, carry each other’s burdens, share the stories of our lives, and treasure memories held in common. We can join together to serve the larger community around us, and take satisfaction in the positive, tangible impact we can have, for today and for those who will come after us.

Meyers, in *The American Paradox*, wrote:

Like marriage, civic connections are significant predictors of happiness and satisfaction with one’s life. People who eat with friends and are active in their churches are happier than those who don’t. Communities with higher levels of civic engagement tend to have less crime, lower mortality, more efficient government, and higher academic performance— regardless of the community’s wealth, racial composition, or educational level.<sup>34</sup>

We can build our communities by going beyond the call to make a positive difference in the lives of those around us. We can find meaning by helping people whose needs are *not* covered by

government services. We can serve as volunteers and donate to nonprofit organizations that provide meals to the hungry and provide shelter for the homeless. We can pitch in to clean up our parks and beaches. We can raise money for local schools to enrich their programs. We can give children special opportunities to enjoy music, art, and athletics. We can fight the “have-have not” divide by providing internet access for students who need it to do their homework. The list goes on. Most importantly, we can be kind and thoughtful, and treat others with dignity and respect.

In *Tuesdays with Morrie*, Mitch Albom described the weekly conversations about the meaning of life that he had with his former Brandeis University sociology professor, Morrie Schwartz, during Morrie’s final days. Morrie told him: “Invest in the human family. Invest in people. Build a little community of those you love and who love you.”<sup>35</sup>

Richard J. Leider partnered with a research organization to ask people what mattered in their lives. In his book, *The Power of Purpose*, he reported that “regardless of age, gender, financial status, or life phase, the majority of people assign the most importance to meaning-related activities and, above all else, spending time with friends and family.”<sup>36</sup> In the surveys I conducted, “family” received the highest rating as a source of meaning.

Families are our most fundamental communities. We depend on the love and help that our families can give us. For most of us, that love and help begins when we are children growing up, and it continues throughout our lives, as we marry and start our own families, or participate in extended families, including grandparents, aunts, uncles, nieces, and nephews. We benefit from multi-generational families, and from extended families that include people who are close friends and become part of our family life.

While most families are biological, millions of parents have

created families by adopting children. They know that being a family is not about biology, it is about love and commitment. What makes these adoptive parents the *real* parents is the daily love and care that they give their children.

Nuclear families have been declining as more single-parent families have emerged, usually headed by the mother. With more mothers working, daycare has become more important, as well as after school programs for older “latchkey” children. However, according to Edward O. Wilson in his book *On Human Nature*, the family is not headed for extinction. He said: “The family, defined broadly as a set of closely related adults with their children, remains one of the universals of human social organization.”<sup>37</sup>

I admire my grandmother, Charlotte Berry Johnston, a devout Nebraska Methodist who, as a widow, raised ten children, including my mother. She raised her children during the Great Depression of the 1930s, followed by World War II. She was physically small, quiet, self-effacing, and spiritually strong. She set the example for all ten children, who helped each other grow up. My mother was the seventh child, and she took care of her three younger siblings. They didn’t have much, but they had their faith and they had each other. Of the ten children, they all earned bachelor’s degrees, and four earned Ph.D.s during their careers. They remained friends throughout their lives, staying in touch regularly to the very end.

I admire my mother, Evelyn Keith, a woman of grace and wisdom, whose love held our family together when I was growing up. My father was a United States Marine, so our family moved, almost every year, when he was transferred from post to post. Because we were always new in the community and didn’t stay anywhere for long, the five of us were often all we had. We were our own little community, and mom made it a strong one.

I admire my wife, Dr. Elizabeth Misao Keith, a talented, caring

woman whose love and attention turned the two of us and our three children into a family. She was always planning family activities, as well as outings and new experiences for our children. She was a passionate champion for our children, always making sure that they got what they needed so they could grow and fulfill their potential. Today, our three children are adults, and our relationships are the strongest they have ever been.

We all know that families can be messy and dysfunctional. And yet, families are where it feels natural to give and receive unconditional love, the kind of love that can hold us together even when we disagree with each other's ideas or disapprove of each other's behavior. It is the kind of love that can stretch us and change us.

That "stretching and changing" is what happened to Jackie, the father, in the movie *Billy Elliot*. The story was set in Durham, England during the 1984-85 coal miner's strike. Billy Elliot was an 11-year old boy who loved jumping and dancing. His father Jackie and his older brother Tony were both miners, and their labor union was on strike. Times were tough.

Jackie sent Billy to boxing class, but there was also a ballet class in the gym, and Billy became interested, finally joining the class. When his father discovered that Billy was dancing ballet, he became angry, and forbid him to attend the class. Ballet was not something that men in their family did.

However, with the help of his dance teacher, Billy secretly continued to dance. Eventually, his father saw that Billy had talent, and his attitude changed. He realized that ballet was Billy's best chance for a future that was better than working in the coal mines. However, because of the miner's strike, Jackie didn't have the money to send Billy to auditions at the Royal Ballet School in London.

For the sake of his son's future, Jackie did something that he

would never have done otherwise. In violation of his own commitment to the union, he attempted to cross the picket line so he could earn money for Billy. In an emotional confrontation, his oldest son Tony stopped him. Instead, his fellow miners and the members of the neighborhood took up a collection to raise money for Billy's trip.

Jackie took his son to London for the audition, an awkward experience that almost went awry. Jackie was completely out of his comfort zone, but he was there to stand by his son. In the end, Billy was accepted into the school. Years later, Billy was a star ballet dancer. His father and older brother went to London and watched Billy perform in *Swan Lake*. They looked and felt out of place, but they went to support Billy. It wasn't about their comfort zone, it was about being a family. Jackie watched Billy dance, and was visibly moved. *That's my son!*

Oe Kenzaburo is a Japanese writer and activist who has addressed political, social, and philosophical issues in his work. He was awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1994.

In 1963 his son was born with a severe brain hemorrhage. Doctors tried to convince Oe to let his son die, but Oe refused. Instead, he named his son "Hikari," which means "light" because he was the light of his life. Even after an operation, Hikari remained visually impaired, developmentally challenged, epileptic, and with limited physical coordination. He did not speak until he was seven years old, and to this day does not speak much. However, he was receptive to sound, and he became a popular composer.

In his 1964 book, *A Personal Matter*, Oe described his journey as a young father who struggled with his decision to let his baby live, against the advice of medical doctors. He decided to support his son and make him an important part of his life. His son influenced his career— Oe said he tried to give his son "voice" through his writing. When asked about his greatest

accomplishment, Oe said it was not his Nobel Prize, but rather being home every night to tuck his son into bed.

Families create homes. What is a home? That was a question addressed by Robert Frost in his poem, “The Death of the Hired Man.” In the poem, a husband and wife discuss what to do about Silas, an old man who was one of their hired hands and is now too old to work. He has returned to their farm to die. The husband says that “home is the place where, when you have to go there, they have to take you in.” The wife replies: “I should have called it something you somehow haven’t to deserve.”

In our families and communities, we can give each other a home. It’s not something we deserve, but something we need. We need to have homes with strong, lasting relationships. They make our lives far more meaningful. Meyers wrote:

When asked, ‘What is necessary for your happiness?’ or ‘What is it that makes your life meaningful?’ most people mention— before anything else— satisfying close relationships with family, friends, or romantic partners. As C. S. Lewis said, ‘The sun looks down on nothing half so good as a household laughing together over a meal.’ Dining alone is not a recipe for happiness.<sup>38</sup>

*It is more meaningful to be part of a community than to be individualistic and lonely.*

## Fame < Intimacy

**It is more meaningful to be intimately known to a few people than to be vaguely familiar to millions.**

*Citizen Kane* is one of the greatest movies ever made. It is the story of a young boy whose mother suddenly came into a fortune and sent him away to be raised in the big city by a banker who could manage his wealth for him until he came of age. Eventually, he became a media mogul, the owner of newspapers and radio stations throughout the country. He rapidly became powerful and famous, a potential contender for the U. S. presidency. He built a mansion and filled it with artifacts from around the world. But he was unable to establish intimate relationships, and he was never really happy. When he died, his last word was “Rosebud.” That was the name of the sled that he used as a child, before his mother sent him away. For all his wealth, power, and fame, he was never as happy as when he was a child, sledding down a snowy hill while his mother watched him from her window.

Many people want to be famous. They want to be talked about. They want to have their names in the newspaper. They want to be on TV. They want to be interviewed on the radio. They want to be followed on social media. They want to be greeted by mobs of fans and reporters. They want to be adored and admired. They want to be known by millions throughout the land.

“I want to be famous one day.” There’s nothing wrong with ambition, if your ambition is to be your best. That kind of ambition can be positive and productive. But fame is not a reliable source of meaning.

What can fame do for you? It may give you a sense of importance, status, prestige, acceptance. A hotel may upgrade your room; you may get the best seat in the restaurant; it may be easier to get tickets for the big game; you may be able to socialize with other famous people. It may be very pleasant indeed.

But fame has a price. You may be hounded by reporters, photographers, and autograph seekers. And you are expected to keep up your image, living in the right place, showing up at the right events, driving the right kind of car, wearing the right kind of clothes, being seen with the right people. Life can become a rat race.

Fame can also become a kind of prison. When you are famous, there are some things you can't do anymore. You can't have a quiet night out, or stroll through the mall, or relax at the beach, or browse at a bookstore, without being interrupted by people who want your autograph, your attention, your help, your praise. Fame is also not safe: You may be stalked or physically assaulted by sick people who are attracted to you. You may have to lead a secluded life, just to protect yourself.

Fame is often short-lived. Your fame may last longer than the fifteen minutes of fame that Andy Warhol suggested that each of us would have, but it eventually fades. And when your fame declines, you are a "has been," no longer in the limelight. There are no more interviews (except perhaps a semi-embarrassing "where are they now?" piece). No more mobs of fans and reporters. No more invitations to the right parties, and maybe not enough money to live in the right place, drive the right kind of car, wear the right kind of clothes, and keep up with the right people.

I am fascinated by the life of T.E. Lawrence, an archeologist, British army officer, diplomat, and writer who lived from 1888 to 1935. After becoming extremely famous, he tried to manage his life without the burdens of fame.

Lawrence graduated from Oxford University, worked as an archeologist for the British Museum, and then joined the British Army in 1914 when World War I broke out. He became famous for his role in the Arab Revolt against the Ottoman Empire during World War I. He was a liaison to the Arab forces, and participated in military actions, sometimes in a leadership role. He showed

himself to be a superb tactician and theoretician of guerrilla warfare. By the time the motley Arab army reached Damascus in 1918, Lawrence was said to be physically and emotionally exhausted, having forced himself to the breaking point many times. He had been wounded several times; had been captured and tortured; had suffered hunger and disease; and had survived extreme weather conditions in the desert. As a result of his exploits, he became known as “Lawrence of Arabia,” the title of a movie about him that appeared in 1962. He is often pictured in Arab attire.

T. E. Lawrence was intriguing, controversial, and extremely famous. Then in 1922, at the age of 34, he dropped out of public life. Using an assumed name, he became an enlisted man in the Royal Air Force. The press found him there, so he was discharged, but in 1923 he took another assumed name and enlisted as a private in the Royal Tanks Corps. *Seven Pillars of Wisdom*, an account of his participation in the Arab Revolt, received extensive publicity when it appeared in abridged form in 1927. The press could not find him, because he was serving under an assumed name at a post in India.

In 1932, his English translation of Homer’s *Odyssey* was published under the name of T.E. Shaw, which he had made his legal name. He continued to write while working the last six years of his life as a mechanic in the Royal Air Force. When he was discharged from the Royal Air Force in 1935, he went to live alone in a cottage in Dorset. One day he was riding a motorcycle through the Dorset countryside, when he had to swerve suddenly to avoid hitting two boys on bicycles. He crashed into a telephone pole, was hurled more than 100 feet, and was severely injured. The King’s own physician came to attend to him, but Lawrence died six days later at the hospital. An obituary stated that at the end of World War I, Lawrence was the uncrowned king of Arabia, adding that Lawrence was regarded as one of the most remarkable men ever to serve in the British army.

One brief account of his life states that when he dropped out of public life in 1922, he hoped to escape his fame and acquire material for a new book he wanted to write. When he was discovered by the press, he changed jobs, and eventually he changed his name, in the hope of finding some anonymity.

It is reported that while trying to maintain a low profile, Lawrence corresponded with and was a friend of well-known artists, writers, and politicians, including painter Augustus John, poet Robert Graves, novelists Joseph Conrad and E. M. Forster, and political leader Winston Churchill. When he took the name T.E. Shaw, it was because of his friendship with Irish writer George Bernard Shaw, winner of the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1925.

Lawrence's story fascinates me because it is possible that while dodging fame, he sought and was able to find intimacy in his friendships. I hope he did, because intimacy is far more meaningful than fame.

Intimacy is being well known to a few people. Intimacy is sharing hopes, dreams, highs, and lows with those you trust. Intimacy is knowing others well enough to learn from their lives as they learn from yours. Intimate relationships are deep, warm, personal, and private. They are about who you *really* are, not who social media or the press say you are.

Intimacy gives you a sense of acceptance, importance, and stature in the hearts and minds of those whose love and friendship you treasure the most. This intimacy need never fade. It does not depend on where you live or what you wear. It depends on the quality of your character and the quality of your love and friendship. Intimacy is not a rat race. It is a safe harbor, a place of refuge. Fame is imprisoning. Intimacy is liberating.

"Intimate relationships" rated very high as a source of personal meaning in the surveys I conducted. One study suggested that the

best single indicator of a person's happiness is having at least one positive, intimate relationship. If a person has a soulmate, his or her entire life is likely to be happy. Another study found that people with a strong relationship with a friend or spouse lived longer and were healthier than those who lived alone.

It is a deep joy to know and love people, and to be known and loved by them in return. Each of us is fortunate if we have that intimacy with our families and friends. It is a source of meaning worth far more than fame.

*It is more meaningful to be intimately known to a few people than to be vaguely familiar to millions.*

## Wealth < Richness of Life

**It is more meaningful to enjoy the richness of life  
than to be wealthy and unhappy.**

There is a poem by E. A. Robinson titled “Richard Cory.” The poem describes a man who was well-schooled, imperially slim, and richer than a king. All the common people in the town looked up to him. Then one summer night, Richard Cory went home and put a bullet through his head. Richard Cory was rich, but it wasn’t enough for him. His wealth wasn’t meaningful. He didn’t think life was worth living.

Mary Anne Evans, an English woman who wrote novels under the pen name of George Eliot, was one of the greatest novelists of the nineteenth century. Her works probed human motivation and meaning. In *Silas Marner*, published in 1861, she described a weaver who as a young man was betrayed by his best friend and framed for a theft he did not commit. He was expelled from his church and lost his fiancé. He moved to another town, where he lived as a hermit, focused on his weaving and obsessed with the gold that he earned.

One day his gold was stolen, and he was devastated. However, a short time later, he found a child sleeping at his hearth. The little girl had walked to his cottage after her mother had died in the snow. Marner came to love the little girl and raised her as his daughter. He found their life together so fulfilling that when his gold was discovered and returned to him many years later, it didn’t mean much to him. His life was rich without it.

If you are struggling in poverty, trying to meet basic needs, then having more money can definitely make your life happier. But study after study, as well as common sense, tell us that people who are wealthy are not necessarily happier than those who aren’t wealthy. A study of lottery winners found that, over time, they were not happier because of their new wealth. And a study of the

Forbes 400 list of the world's richest men and women found that "they have only a tad bit more life satisfaction than people living at the median income."<sup>39</sup> It is not being rich, but enjoying the richness of life, that makes people happy.

I was reminded of this by my encounter with a man of means named Milton Cades. He was a senior partner at the law firm in which I was a young associate. He was a connoisseur of good wine, and often hosted wine tastings. One Saturday morning when I was at the office, I got a call from a senior associate who told me that a case of wine had been delivered to the law firm that was supposed to be delivered to the Cades residence. Mr. Cades needed it that day to prepare for a wine tasting. I was the newest, lowest-ranking associate available, so I was told to drive out to Mr. Cades' house and deliver the wine.

It was a beautiful day, and I enjoyed the drive out to Diamond Head, where Mr. and Mrs. Cades lived. I knocked on the door, gave him my name, and said that I had his wine in my car. He was delighted. I carried it in, and he showed me where to put it. As I turned to leave, he asked me if I would like some fresh-roasted macadamia nuts. I said yes, I would. He invited me into the living room to chat, while his wife roasted the nuts. Then he thought of the perfect wine to drink with the nuts, and opened a bottle, serving me elegantly. We drank, and munched, and chatted happily.

Then he asked if I would like to see his wine cellar. I said yes, I would. We went outside, around the back of the house, and down the hill to the entrance to his wine cellar. It was dug into the hillside under the house, and it was magnificent. Row upon row of wine racks filled with bottles, along with temperature and humidity controls, even cobwebs in the right places. He invited me to try a bottle, and I said thank you, but I had to get back. We had been chatting for more than an hour, and it had been very pleasant.

As he escorted me to the door, he asked me how long I had been working for the wine store. “Uh, well, actually, I’m an associate at your law firm,” I said. “The wine was delivered there by mistake, so I was asked to bring it out to you.”

He seemed a little embarrassed that he hadn’t recognized me as a new associate, but I assured him that it didn’t matter. I had truly enjoyed being with him.

As I drove off, I thought: Here is a man who has plenty of money and plenty of important friends. And yet, he just spent more than an hour personally hosting a young person whom he thought was a delivery boy from a wine store. He simply wanted to share his hobby and make a new acquaintance. I was struck by his spirit of hospitality, his enthusiasm, and his genuine interest in others. Here was a man who was rich but didn’t let his wealth prevent him from enjoying the richness of life.

Sadly, being rich *can* make it harder to have a rich life. This point was made very painfully by John Steinbeck in his book, *The Pearl*. The story is about a young pearl diver, Kino, his wife Juana, and their baby, Coyotito. They lived a simple life in a poor village.

Then one day Kino found a huge pearl of immense value— The Pearl of the World— and it brought out the worst in everyone. Everyone thought about how they could benefit from the pearl, and that made Kino suspicious and afraid of everyone. The local doctor made Coyotito sick so he could “cure” him for a large fee. The local pearl buyers conspired to offer Kino a very low price for the pearl. Kino was attacked two nights in a row by robbers. Juana decided that the pearl was evil, but when she tried to toss it back into the ocean, Kino struck and kicked her. The robbers became bolder and bolder, finally smashing his fishing boat and burning down his house in an attempt to steal the pearl from him. In defending himself, Kino killed a robber.

Hiding in his brother’s house, Kino realized too late that if he

had just given the pearl away, all this misfortune would not have occurred. But the pearl had become too important to him to give up. He and Juana and Coyotito left the village during the night to travel to the big city, where he hoped to get a fair price for his pearl. But trackers followed them, and they climbed up to a mountain cave to hide. Kino left the cave at night to attack the trackers, but as he was ready to leap upon them, Coyotito cried, and a tracker fired his gun at the noise. As Kino ferociously attacked and killed all three of the trackers, he heard Juana's hysterical cry: Coyotito had been hit by the tracker's bullet. He was dead.

Kino and Juana returned to their village. Kino walked to the shore and threw the pearl back into the ocean. They had lost their house, the fishing boat they needed to make a living, and most of all, their child.

*The Pearl* is a fable, but its message is well taken. For example, in the late 1990s, when high tech companies were booming and millionaires were being created daily, many modern-day Kinos and Juanas faced similar problems when they became wealthy overnight. Newspapers reported on "sudden wealth syndrome." High tech managers who suddenly became millionaires became withdrawn, suspicious of everyone. They divorced their spouses, erected security fences, and lived isolated, unhappy lives, unable to cope with their sudden wealth.

Even if wealth does not change your personality and nobody tries to rob you, wealth can change how you spend your time. You can easily get tied down by your wealth— managing it, protecting it, reinvesting it, minimizing the taxes on it. You can easily spend so much time worrying about how to keep it that you have less time to enjoy spending it.

Having wealth definitely changes your relationships. You can easily become defensive because you know that you are a target for people who want your money. Some want donations; some want

support for their business ventures; and some will just try to overcharge you or scam you, because they know you can afford it. You question the motives of those who approach you, wondering what they are *really* after. You wonder: Is he your friend, or is he the friend of your money? Meanwhile, people you might wish to know, and would enjoy knowing, are put off by your wealth. Your wealth builds a wall that they are not willing to scale.

Of course, you can spend your time with other wealthy people, but that may only result in unhappiness due to “reference anxiety”— comparing yourself with others. People who have \$5 million feel “poor” compared with those who have \$10 million, and they feel “poor” compared with those who have \$20 million. Even if you are not trying to compete with others, you may be unhappy if your own wealth is not *growing*.

I have known rich people, and I have been in some of their mansions. Their mansions are awesome buildings. But it has always puzzled me: What do you do with a fifty-room mansion? How do you enjoy it? Do you move from room to room every ten minutes? Of course, you can invite your closest one hundred friends over for the weekend. But after you do that half a dozen times— well, then what?

My guess is that no matter what the size of their houses, people spend most of their time eating in the kitchen, watching television or using their devices in the living room, and sleeping in the bedroom. A den or office is useful if you want a personal library and a place for a desktop computer. And occasionally friends are invited over, so the dining room gets used, and maybe a guest bedroom. But that’s about it. I can’t see how the other forty-four of those fifty rooms in the great mansions get used. What’s worse, those forty-four extra rooms have to be maintained and occasionally upgraded, with new carpet, paint, furniture, and plumbing, not to mention the roof repairs. So huge amounts of money and environmental resources go into maintaining the mansion, but most of the mansion is never used.

Yes, it would be fun to be rich and impress people for a month or two. The private jets, the limousines, the hotel suites, the private parties, the expensive restaurants would be a kick. In the end, however, being rich would just teach us that wealth does not give us a lot of personal meaning.

In fact, the most meaningful thing one can do with vast wealth is to give it away. There's nothing wrong with money that giving it away can't cure. Give it away to people and organizations that will use it to make the world a better place to live. Endow projects and organizations that will continue to do good work long after you are gone. That can be *very* meaningful.

Fortunately, enjoying the richness of life can cost comparatively little. Anna Quindlen, in *A Short Guide to a Happy Life*, urged her readers to "get a life." She said:

Get a life in which you notice the smell of salt water pushing itself on a breeze over the dunes, a life in which you stop and watch how a red-tailed hawk circles over a pond and a stand of pines. Get a life in which you pay attention to the baby as she scowls with concentration when she tries to pick up a Cheerio with her thumb and first finger...

I never think of my life, or my world, in any big cosmic way. I think of it in all its small component parts: the snowdrops, the daffodils; the feeling of one of my kids sitting close beside me on the couch; the way my husband looks when he reads with the lamp behind him; fettuccine Alfredo; fudge; *Gone with the Wind*, *Pride and Prejudice*. Life is made up of moments, small pieces of glittering mica in a long stretch of gray cement.<sup>40</sup>

One of the breakthroughs in my own life was discovering that I could enjoy something without owning it. I learned to enjoy the beauty of a painting, or a ceramic bowl, or an automobile, or a house, without feeling that I had to have it. I could walk away from

it, feeling richer simply because I had seen it. I didn't have to own it to enjoy it. The experience was mine; the object in question didn't have to be mine.

A rich life is made up of time with friends and family, attending a daughter's soccer game, viewing the sunset from a mountain top, having a quiet dinner with a spouse or special friend, poring over the Sunday paper with coffee and croissants. A rich life is full of exciting work, great causes, and commitments. A rich life is full of adventure, through reading and travel and trying new activities— photography, archery, gardening, the French horn, hiking.

A rich life is a creative life, one that keeps you renewing, recreating, constantly growing. In his book, *Creativity*, Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi reported on his study of people who are creative in their work and their lives. He said that creativity is a central source of meaning in our lives for at least two reasons. First, most of the things that are interesting, important, and *human* are the results of creativity. Our creativity as individual humans is what distinguishes us from apes. Second, when we are involved in creative acts, we feel that we are living more fully than during the rest of life. "The excitement of the artist at the easel or the scientist in the lab comes close to the ideal fulfillment we all hope to get from life, and so rarely do," he said.<sup>41</sup>

Dave Heenan's book, *Double Lives*, describes people who have found lasting fulfillment and achievement by developing more than one vocation or passion. For example, in addition to his life in politics, Winston Churchill was an accomplished writer and painter. Norio Ohga, Chairman of the Board of Sony Company, was also a professional opera singer and orchestra conductor. Sally Ride was an astronaut, and also a physicist, professor, author, tennis player, and entrepreneur. Tess Gerritsen, the daughter of Chinese immigrants, wanted to be a writer, but became a medical doctor because it was a more sustainable career. Then she became both— a doctor and a best-selling author of medical thrillers.

Heenan advised:

Wise people find avocations that they love and do well. They find people and causes they can believe in and serve with all their hearts and minds. They give their love and their energy to projects that improve people's lives, not diminish them. They find ways to savor all of life, not just the rewards of work. They define success on their own terms.<sup>42</sup>

In addition to time with our family and friends, my wife and I have found our lives greatly enriched by many kinds of music, movies, and theater performances. These are things we can experience together and then enjoy talking about afterwards.

Early in our marriage, my wife and I decided that we did not want to spend much money on cars, clothing, or expensive restaurants. Instead, we decided to save our money and spend it on traveling. We love to travel! We travel coach or economy fare, we stay in modest hotels, and we take advantage of special offers.

Our lives have been greatly enriched by the trips we have taken. We know that every place on earth has its own culture and history, its own interesting people, its own art and architecture. Every place on earth has its own natural beauty and its own adventures. We are always planning our next trip!

We have bounced around in a safari truck while following an elephant herd in Botswana; cruised among the eerie, green "floating islands" in Halong Bay, Vietnam; experienced the symphony of light and the tree-like columns inside La Sagrada Familia, a basilica in Barcelona, Spain; hummed up a jungle river on a speedboat in Borneo, watching for crocodiles; listened to an angelic choir during a Christmas Eve service in the Lisbon Cathedral in Portugal; gazed at glow worms while floating through a dark cave in Waitomo, New Zealand; watched sea turtles riding up and down on the nearshore waves in Hawaii; found ourselves suddenly submerged under the rapids during a

whitewater rafting expedition in New Mexico; climbed the 1,200 steps to the top of Lion Rock in Sri Lanka, where a king built his castle around 490 A.D.; woke up in our RV one morning in Monument Valley, part of the Navajo Nation, feeling like we were in a Western movie; floated down the Ayeyarwady River in Myanmar, lined with simple huts and wooden boats that probably looked the same a thousand years ago; danced in the aisles at the end of a live performance of *Mama Mia!* on Broadway; watched water-walking lizards in a forest in Costa Rica; listened to an evening Mozart concert in a meadow in Vermont; rode a small wooden “bumboat” that slowly chugged from Singapore to a small town in Malaysia where we had a seafood lunch; and stood stunned, in total awe of the beauty of the Taj Mahal in Agra, India.

Traveling for us is an experience of discovery and enchantment as we see where and how other people live. We can be traveling not far from our home, or on another continent. What we see and hear always enriches our lives.

We have been enriched not only by travel, but by the years we have spent living in other countries. We have both lived in Japan and Singapore; before we were married, my wife had also lived in France, and I had also lived in England. All those experiences helped us to understand other countries and cultures, but also *our own* country and culture. One of the best ways to learn about your own country is to see it through the eyes of people who live somewhere else.

Most of us need to make a living, but we don't need to be rich. It is living a rich life that is important. The things that make your life rich may seem like “little things” to the world, but they can be big things to you. They can be big in meaning and satisfaction, bringing you richness in life far greater than mere wealth can provide.

*It is more meaningful to enjoy the richness of life than to be wealthy and unhappy.*

## Power < Service

**It is more meaningful to serve others than to  
make them serve you.**

Robert Penn Warren won a Pulitzer Prize for his brilliant novel, *All the King's Men*. The novel is about the transformation of Willie Stark from a country lawyer with good intentions to a power-hungry politician. He began by fighting the corrupt political machine. He got elected governor and did good things for the people. But his desire for power gradually swallowed his desire to serve, and he became the head of his own corrupt political machine. It is a brooding, unsettling story of a man who set out to serve others and ended by making them serve him.

Many people crave power. "If only I had the power, I would..." We imagine ourselves pacing the floor, barking out commands to subordinates, moving the world. "When I say jump, the only question I want to hear is: How high?"

Sometimes we want power to do what is right, to make things better. Sometimes we want power for the sake of prestige, to be important, to make others quake in their shoes. Sometimes we want power for revenge. We remember all the wrongs done to us, and we want the power to get even.

We know that *somebody* will exercise power, and it makes a difference who that person is. It is important that she or he exercise power in a moral way, for an appropriate, justifiable end. We cheer when power is used wisely to support what is right and good and true.

In my experience, however, having power is not as useful or meaningful as people think. Even having *a lot* of power isn't very useful or meaningful. There are lots of drawbacks.

Having excessive power can lead to an empty life. If you are

the king, the autocrat, the company owner, and you can make everybody cater to your every wish, then you may not seek new challenges, and you may stop learning and growing. Your life may also have little content. Since you have the power to make all the decisions, you may not feel the need to engage in dialogue, to confront contradictions, and to grapple with ideas other than your own. It is like looking in the mirror all day. It may be flattering for a while, but very soon, it becomes boring and meaningless.

Having a lot of power can make it hard to do a good job. Yes, you have the power, but you cannot possibly know all that needs to be known to make good decisions. To make good decisions, you need input from others. If the people around you are afraid of you because you are so powerful, they may be reluctant to tell you anything except what they think you want to hear. It is hard to get honest feedback on issues or test out new ideas. The result is that you won't learn what you need to learn, and after a while, you'll start making poor decisions.

Leaders who want to stay in touch with the larger reality and get honest feedback may need to seek it out. In the movie, *The Shoes of the Fisherman*, the Pope slipped out of the Vatican in a simple priest's attire to walk the streets of Rome and get back in touch with the everyday people he was serving. He heard and saw things that he would not have heard or seen at the Vatican.

Similarly, in Shakespeare's play, *Henry V*, the king disguised himself with a cloak and wandered among his troops the night before the battle of Ajincourt. He listened to them to get a sense of what they were thinking and feeling. They respected Henry, and perhaps for that reason, the troops would not have shared their pains and fears with him. He needed to know what they were feeling, but they would not have told him directly.

The biggest limitation on the use of power is simple: In the end, you can't force people to do their best. You can threaten people, and discipline people. However, threatening or punishing people

will often generate a backlash of resentment, opposition, and even retaliation. Overwhelming them with your power will not improve their performance because it will not improve their desire to do a good job. Fear will not move people as far as they will go when they are motivated by their own desire to perform. People work best when they understand what they need to do, have the skills to do it, and *want* to do it. They work best when they are respected, engaged, coached, and inspired.

Unfortunately, people who crave power easily become corrupted and unhappy. There is a famous quote about power attributed to Lord Acton: “Power corrupts and absolute power corrupts absolutely.” The person who seeks power for himself or herself can never get enough. *Never*. The craving for power becomes an addiction that grows stronger and stronger until the person loses his values and becomes spiritually corrupt. And since the person can never get enough power, he is never happy.

Fortunately, there is something more meaningful than power, and that is service. When you love people, you want to help them. You seek to identify and meet their needs. You ask, you listen, and you help in appropriate ways.

There are many ways to serve. You can help members of your family, your organization, your community. You can help others around the world. People need food, clean water, shelter, clothing, healthcare, and education. People need to love and be loved, to belong, to be free, to grow and fulfill their potential.

As you serve, you may find opportunities to serve *by leading*. If so, you will need to decide how you want to lead. In that regard, I see two models or paradigms of leadership in the world. The power model is the dominant model. According to the power model, leadership is about acquiring and wielding power. The other model is the service model. According to the service model, leadership is about making a difference in the lives of others.

There are a number of ways to distinguish the power model of leadership and the service model of leadership. A power-oriented person wants to *make* people do things. A service-oriented person wants to *help* people do things. The power model assumes an organizational hierarchy, like a pyramid, in which only the people at the top are assumed to be leaders because only they have power. The service model assumes no hierarchy. It assumes that *anybody* in any family, organization, or community can identify and meet the needs of others. Anybody can be of service.

People who live the service model are often called servant leaders. Servant leaders don't ask, "How can I get power? How can I make people do things?" Servant leaders ask, "What do people need? How can I help them to get it?" Instead of seeking power, servant leaders seek to be of service. Albert Einstein said that "the high destiny of the individual is to serve rather than to rule."

One of my favorite movies is *Dave*, starring Kevin Kline and Sigourney Weaver. It is a movie about Dave Kovic, who ran a temporary employment agency in Washington, D.C. He happened to look exactly like the President of the United States, so he had a side job impersonating President Bill Mitchell at community events. Then the Secret Service discovered him and asked him to pretend to be the President. They wanted him to serve as a decoy when the President left a hotel after giving a speech. This was to be done to cover up Mitchell's extramarital affair with a member of his White House staff.

During his "rendezvous" with the staff member, Mitchell suffered a stroke, leaving him in a coma. White House Chief of Staff Bob Alexander and Communications Director Alan Reed convinced Dave to continue playing the role of President, so they could stay in power. Only Bob, Alan, the Secret Service, and the medical staff knew of the switch. First Lady Ellen Mitchell didn't suspect anything at first, because she and the President led separate lives, in contrast to their public image of a closely knit couple. Dave was told that Vice President Gary Nance could not

assume responsibility because he was mentally unbalanced. It was all part of Bob Alexander's plan to use the situation so that he could become President.

It turned out that Dave was a better President than Mitchell. Dave cared about people. He wanted childcare centers to have funds, and he wanted people to have jobs. His energy and caring were noticed by the First Lady, who figured out that Dave was not her husband. She and Dave decided to work together to do some good. Dave forced Bob Alexander into resigning by threatening to reveal the presidential switch to the public. Then he announced a plan to find a job for every American who wanted work. A few days later, Vice President Nance returned from a trip to Africa. Dave met with him and learned that Nance was a good man.

Dave knew that Vice President Nance should become the next President, so he developed a scheme to make it happen. He called a joint session of Congress so he could make a speech. During his speech, he admitted to Mitchell's role in a scandal, but introduced evidence proving that Bob Alexander was the mastermind and Nance was innocent. Then Dave apologized to the American people. What he said is a good definition of servant leadership. He said:

I should have cared more about you than about me. I should have cared more about what is right than what is popular. I should be willing to give up the whole thing for something I believe in, because if I'm not... I don't belong here in the first place.

With those last words, Dave pretended to have a stroke, falling to the floor. They carried Dave out to a waiting ambulance and switched him with Mitchell on the way to the hospital. When they got to the hospital, it was the body of the real President that was taken from the ambulance, and Dave walked home.

Nance became Acting President under the terms of the 25th Amendment and was sworn in as President five months later when

Mitchell died. Dave, who went back to his temporary employment agency, decided to run for city council. There is a happy ending, but for that, you'll just have to watch the movie.

Servant leaders do a lot of watching and listening before they take action. They know that what each individual or organization needs will vary, depending on the situation. They keep looking and listening to identify the needs that must be met for a person or organization to be happy, healthy and productive. The goal is to provide the right help at the right time.

Albert Schweitzer said that “the only ones among you who will be really happy are those who will have sought and found how to serve.” The Nobel-prize-winning Indian poet Tagore wrote: “I awoke and saw that life was service. I acted and behold, service was joy.” Joy and personal meaning come from serving others.

*It is more meaningful to serve others than to make them serve you.*

## Winning < Personal Best

**It is more meaningful to do your personal best and lose than to win and have no pride in your performance.**

*Cool Runnings* is a delightful movie based on the story of the Jamaican bobsled team at the Winter Olympics in Calgary in 1988. In the trial races for the sprinting team in Jamaica, one sprinter fell and tripped two others, knocking them all out of Olympic contention. Derice was one of the runners who failed to qualify. To get to the winter Olympics, Derice and his best friend, Sanka, decided to start a bobsled team— something Jamaica had never had before. Bobsledding was an unlikely sport, given the lack of snow and bobsledding facilities in balmy Jamaica.

For a coach, they sought out Irv Blitzer, an American bobsledder who won in 1968 and finished first in two events again in 1972. However, he was disqualified for cheating and retired in disgrace to Jamaica. Blitzer finally agreed to coach the Jamaican team. The Jamaicans made it to the Olympics, where they discovered what it is like to be *really cold*, and what it was like to practice in a real bobsled on real ice.

The team was treated with disdain by teams from other countries, some of whom told the Jamaicans to go home. The Jamaican team trained hard, developed its own style, and got better, managing to move into eighth position before their final run. They surprised the bobsledding world with their strong performance.

The Jamaican bobsled team didn't win a gold medal. During their final run, a bolt came loose in their borrowed bobsled. They crashed. It was over.

But for the members of the Jamaican bobsled team, it wasn't over. They had set out to finish the race, so they finished it. They lifted the bobsled onto their shoulders and carried it to the finish

line, as a crowd gathered and began to applaud. They didn't win a gold medal. Instead, they won our hearts and our admiration.

Coaches and competitors often proclaim that winning isn't everything— it's *the only thing*. Certainly, when you play a game, you should try to win. That is the game. That is what gives you focus, that is what brings the team together. Playing to *lose* certainly doesn't make any sense.

What does make sense is measuring your own performance, whether you win or lose. You can constantly strive to improve, competing against your own potential, whether you do better or worse than others. The goal should be to always do your best. When I surveyed people regarding the most important sources of meaning in their lives, “doing my personal best” always got a high rating.

Unfortunately, when people believe that winning is the *only* thing, they are tempted to do *anything* to win— to cheat, take shortcuts, play rough, sacrifice a fellow team member, or put others down. When winning is the only thing, sportsmanship and character can suffer.

In the movie *Cool Runnings*, Derice confronted coach Blitzer the night before their final run. He wanted to know why Blitzer cheated when he was in the Olympics years earlier.

“It's quite simple, really,” Blitzer said. “I had to win. You see, Derice, I made winning my whole life. And when you make winning your whole life, you have to keep on winning, no matter what. You understand that?”

“No,” Derice said. “I don't understand, coach. You had two gold medals. You had it all.”

“Derice, a gold medal is a wonderful thing. But if you're not enough without it, you'll never be enough with it.”

“Hey, coach. How will I know if I’m enough?”

“When you cross that finish line, you’ll know.”

Derice did cross the finish line, carrying his bobsled, and he knew: He was enough. He had done his personal best.

Winning while doing poorly doesn’t feel good and losing while doing one’s personal best doesn’t feel bad. I learned this by watching the basketball team at a university where I worked. I enjoyed going to their games, and I brought my whole family as often as possible. I would watch the faces of the team members as they left the court at the end of the game. I noticed that sometimes when they won, they looked unhappy, because they had played badly. There were other times when they lost, but they stood tall, and even smiled, because they knew that had done their very best.

Apolo Ohno was a short track speed skating Olympic champion. He retired from the sport in 2010 after winning eight medals, which made him the most decorated American at the Winter Olympics. The American public had high hopes for Ohno at the Olympics. I remember that in one race, in which he was expected to win the gold medal, he came in second or third. A reporter interviewed him on camera, saying that Ohno must have felt very disappointed in his performance. Ohno said no, not at all. He wasn’t disappointed in his performance. He had done his very best. Somebody else had just been faster than him.

One of the disadvantages of a focus on winning is that it may cut us off from new experiences. We may not want to learn a new sport or skill because we will have to go through the awkward stage of being a clumsy beginner— a “loser.” We stick with the few things we started when we were much younger, the things at which we can be “competitive” or at least “respectable” in competition.

We may also be reluctant to have fun doing things that we will never be very good at, even after the awkward initial stages. For example, I am a bad golfer. I mean a *bad* golfer. For two years, I

took lessons, practiced at the practice range, and spent hours on golf courses. But I never broke 100. Maybe I could have practiced a lot more, and golfed a lot more often, and finally become “competitive” or “respectable.” What I suspect is that I have absolutely no talent for the game. I’m just not that coordinated. I also have trouble looking at the world with my head tilted sideways.

But it didn’t matter. Every time I played golf, I *enjoyed* it. I enjoyed being with friends. I enjoyed being outdoors in the sun. I enjoyed the beauty of the grass and trees. I satisfied my “hunter-gatherer” instincts by spending a lot of time off in the bushes and trees looking for my ball. And every game I played, I hit one or two shots worth remembering. So after every game, I felt good— physically and mentally. If I were only willing to do things at which I could be “competitive,” I wouldn’t have played golf, and I would have missed all those pleasures.

Here’s another example. My daughter went to a birthday party at an ice skating rink, and came home excited about ice skating. She asked me to take her. I had never ice skated in my life, but I thought it would be fun to skate with my children. So I took a one-hour lesson, and ventured onto the ice. I proceeded to enjoy many hours at the skating rink with my kids.

I never skated backwards or did any spins or twirls. I could skate around the rink, and I could stop (usually). I loved the cold air on my face, and the sensation of gliding over the ice. And when my eight-year-old daughter came skating up to me and wanted to skate holding hands with Daddy, my feet *and* my heart glided happily across the ice. It was one of those little joys that was not so little. It wouldn’t have been any more joyful if I were an Olympic skater, because it wasn’t about how good a skater I was. It was about the fact that I was there, enjoying the ice with my children. I didn’t have to be a competitive skater. My daughter was willing to skate with me just the way I was.

Sometimes, one has to make a choice between winning and performing one's personal best. This choice is found in a marvelous Australian movie, *Strictly Ballroom*. It starts out as a wonderful satire of ballroom competitions, and then becomes a touching love story and a great reminder that we can become so caught up in the desire to win, that we forget the joy of life.

In the movie, Scott Hastings is a young man who has been trained since childhood to be a championship ballroom dancer. His mother and father were successful dancers and they work at a dance studio. Scott is a serious contender for a championship, but he also feels confined by the highly prescribed dance routines. He wants to be creative. He wants to try his own steps.

Scott meets a beginner, Fran, a young Spanish woman. She comes from an economically disadvantaged family of immigrants who live on the wrong side of the tracks. Fran sees Scott practicing his unauthorized steps at the studio one night. She introduces him to her family, and her father and grandmother teach both of them their own style of dancing the *pasadoble*. For Fran's family, dancing is not for competition or trophies. It is at the center of their culture. They dance to the rhythms of their own heartbeats. They dance because that is who they are— people who gather together to dance and celebrate life.

When Scott arrives at the final competition, his mother presses him to dance with a partner who only dances the authorized steps, and can therefore make Scott a winner. Scott is tempted, but at the last moment, he decides he wants to dance the unauthorized *pasadoble*, even if it means he cannot win. He rushes outside to ask Fran to dance with him.

Suddenly, we see Scott sliding out onto the dance floor on his knees, a dramatic, totally unauthorized, defiant entrance— and probably the longest knee slide in the history of cinema. The authorities are so outraged that they stop the music and announce that Scott and Fran are suspended and must leave the floor at once.

The hall is silent, until Scott's father begins to clap, slowly, deliberately. The audience joins in, clapping slowly, deliberately, louder and louder. Scott and Fran begin to dance again, to the beat of the clapping, to the beat of their own hearts. As the music is turned on again, they complete their dance, to roaring applause. And then people climb out of the bleachers, flood onto the dance floor, and begin dancing. Everyone suddenly remembers that dancing is meant to be enjoyed. We were born to dance. It's part of who we are as human beings. It is a way to express ourselves and to be truly alive.

Scott and Fran gave up winning in order to be themselves and do their personal best. They rebelled against dancing as standardized automatons, all doing the same authorized steps to win trophies and championships. They chose to express the joy of dancing, and the joy of life. It was not about winning, it was about living.

As you go through life, keep your eyes on two scoreboards. One is the regular scoreboard that measures public success: the results of the election, the bottom line of the business, the outcome of the athletic event, the result of the contest. The other is a private scoreboard that measures your personal best. This scoreboard is about whether or not you are using your gifts and living your personal values. It is possible to win on both scoreboards, of course, and that is often the case. But the personal meaning comes from scoring high on your private scoreboard— the one that measures your personal best. That's where you can always find personal meaning.

*It is more meaningful to do your personal best and lose than to win and have no pride in your performance.*

## Appearance < Health

**It is more meaningful to be healthy than to be obsessed with your appearance.**

“Successful” people dress the part. They wear fashionable clothes and perfectly matching *accoutrements*. They are very aware of the fashion statements they make, whether those statements are upscale, downscale, or simply iconoclastic. They spend a lot of time on their appearance because “everybody is watching.”

Getting dressed up and feeling special can be a good thing. Occasions become special when we treat them as special, and dressing up can be a positive part of that.

In *The Wonderful Ice Cream Suit*, a movie based on a Ray Bradbury story, five men who are too poor to buy a good suit for themselves decide to pool their funds to buy one suit that will fit each of them. They buy a wonderful suit that is the color of vanilla ice cream and agree to take turns wearing it. Each man is transformed when he puts on the glowing vanilla suit, gaining the confidence to live out his fantasy. One plays the guitar and attracts a crowd of women, who dance with him in the street. Another goes to the park and gives a speech that captivates his audience. One successfully courts a woman; one goes out on the town; one is tempted but then decides not to leave town. They each live a larger life than they lived before, learning about themselves, and becoming friends in the process.

On an everyday basis, each of us should care enough about our appearance to be neat and clean— at least most of the time. But an obsession with one’s appearance is not a good thing.

Unfortunately, it’s a common obsession. We are a nation of people who are fixated on physical appearance. We want to have just the right proportions. We want to cover our blemishes, dye our hair, and hide our wrinkles. We spend billions of dollars each

year on cosmetics.

If we don't like the way we look, we go for cosmetic surgery. As many as 18 million Americans had cosmetic procedures in 2019, including 5.9 million reconstructive procedures. The most popular invasive surgical procedures were nose reshaping, liposuction, eyelid surgery, breast augmentation, and facelifts. We spend billions of dollars each year to surgically change our appearance.

Again, there is nothing wrong with a desire to look one's best. Certainly, there is no point in trying to look *unattractive*. Cosmetic surgery after a disease or accident is humane and understandable.

That new hair style, or sports coat, or piece of jewelry can give pleasure and add a little self-confidence. But clothing and cosmetics can only change your appearance. They will not make you healthy or lengthen your life. They can cover what you see as your faults, but not build your health or increase your longevity.

It is urgent that we build health. While we are spending an immense amount of time and money on our appearance, our nation is suffering from increasingly poor health. According to the American Heart Association, 116 million adults in the United States are estimated to have hypertension. Cardiovascular disease has been the leading cause of death, responsible for 840,768 deaths in 2016. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 34 million Americans have diabetes, and 42% of the population is obese.

Exercise can help change these statistics. Inactivity has been linked to 17 chronic diseases and other health conditions. Lack of exercise is thought to be responsible for 250,000 deaths per year— more deaths than are caused by alcohol, firearms, illicit drugs, and motor-vehicle accidents *combined*. The cost of treating these inactivity-related illnesses has been estimated as high as \$1 trillion per year.

What would it take to turn the tide, and start saving lives? Health experts recommend at least 30 minutes of moderate exercise every other day. That could be 30 minutes of walking, jogging, swimming, playing tennis, or working out in a gym. Even climbing stairs, instead of taking the elevator, can make a difference.

I am glad that a *moderate* amount of exercise can make a difference, because I am only getting a moderate amount myself. I start each day with 15 minutes of simple calisthenics and stretching exercises. Then each morning my wife and I walk our dogs for 30 to 45 minutes, enjoying the natural beauty of the public parks in our area. Several times a week, I get on our elliptical machine. At least twenty times each day, I go up and down the stairs inside our house and between our house, our garage, and the street. At night, before going to bed, I do more calisthenics and stretching, and a set of simple arm curls with dumbbells. What I enjoy most is working out on the strength machines at my local YMCA, but that is something that doesn't happen often enough!

Earlier, I mentioned “Blue Zones,” which are regions of the world where a higher than usual number of people live longer and continue to be healthy and active until the very end of their lives. After studying these regions, Dan Buettner shared nine lessons for living longer. Four of those lessons I shared above: purpose, belonging, loved ones first, and the right tribe (being surrounded by those who share Blue Zone values). The other five lessons are:

- *move naturally*; be active without having to think about it; a moderate level of exercise that is sustained is helpful; try to combine aerobic, balancing, and muscle-strengthening
- *hara hachi bu* (stop eating when your stomach is 80 percent full); painlessly cut calories by 20 percent
- *plant slant*; avoid meat and processed foods
- *grapes of life*; drink red wine in moderation

- *downshift*; take time to relieve stress<sup>43</sup>

The theme is moderation. Exercise moderately, eat moderately, drink moderately, and work moderately.

You will be able to do everything better and longer if you take care of yourself first. That's why you can find personal meaning by exercising, eating right, getting enough sleep, not smoking, keeping your alcohol consumption at a modest level, and getting regular check-ups. When you are healthy, you glow from the inside. Your energy and vitality are obvious to others, no matter what you are wearing, or how you are made up.

Being healthy can have a positive impact on your mental attitude and can lift your spirits. If you are healthy, you can have a long and active life, regardless of your external appearance. You will have more years with your loved ones, and more time and energy to make a contribution to the world around you. And that can be very meaningful indeed.

*It is more meaningful to be healthy than to be obsessed with your appearance.*

## Job < Mission

**It is more meaningful to have a mission than a job.**

The United States Air Force produced a TV ad that began with a mother and her children playing in their living room. The scene froze, with the mother and children facing the camera, smiling. The camera drew back, and you could see that it was a photograph attached to a wall. The camera drew back farther, and you see that the wall was the side panel in the cockpit of an airplane. As the camera continued to draw back, you saw the pilot, the father, flying at night, with the photo of his family there next to him. And suddenly you knew that he wasn't just flying a plane. He was protecting the family and the country that he loved. He was on a mission.

I have had many jobs. Each one has had its difficulties and disadvantages. Each one has been tedious or tiring at times. But each one has been very satisfying, because each one has been part of a larger mission that has given me great personal meaning. Whether it was improving the economy, or providing educational opportunities to college students, or serving kids and families, the mission has always meant a lot to me.

A meaningful life can be described as a calling, a vocation, something that we were born to do, something that gives our souls peace. In his book, *Finding Meaning in the Second Half of Life*, James Hollis says:

We may choose careers, but we do not choose vocation. Vocation chooses us. *To choose what chooses us* is a freedom the by-product of which will be a sense of rightness and harmony within, even if lived out in the world of conflict, absent validation, and at considerable personal cost...

Vocation, even in the most humble of circumstances, is a summons to what is divine. Perhaps it is the divinity in us

that wishes to be in accord with a larger divinity...  
Ultimately, our vocation is to become ourselves...<sup>44</sup>

The difference between a job and a mission is up to us. It is a matter of how we see our work. Each job is likely to be “just a job” to us unless we can see the larger purpose, the overall goal, the way in which we are contributing to something greater than ourselves. That’s where the meaning is to be found.

Unfortunately, not everybody sees their work as a mission or a calling, and as a result, their work is less satisfying. They miss the meaning that is available to them. Daniel Hayborn, in his book *Happiness*, wrote:

In the workplace, workers who see their job merely as a paycheck or a career take up the instrumental attitude toward their work: just a means to getting something else (money, promotion...). And they tend to have much less satisfying work experiences than those who see their work as a ‘calling...’ The difference isn’t in the job itself but in the worker’s attitude: janitors and trash collectors can adopt the calling orientation and see their work as intrinsically meaningful and fulfilling.<sup>45</sup>

The story is told of a monk traveling through medieval Europe. As he walked, he came upon a plain, and in the distance he could see the foundation of a cathedral that was being built. As he walked toward the cathedral, he came across the quarry where stones were being shaped for use in the cathedral.

There were two men down in the quarry chipping stone. The monk approached the first one and said: “Good morning, kind sir. Tell me, what are you doing?” The man looked up at him and said: “I am chipping stone.” The monk said thank you, and walked to the second man in the quarry. “Good morning, kind sir,” he said. “Tell me, what are you doing? The man put down his chisel and looked up with a smile. “I am building a cathedral,” he said.

The two men were doing the same thing, the same physical task. But one was getting little meaning out of his work, while the other was getting a lot.

You should get a lot of meaning from the work you are doing. If you think you are just doing sales or accounting or HR or product development, you are just flying a plane. If you think you are just doing IT or customer service or finance or employee training, you are just chipping stone. You need to be on a mission. You need to know what cathedral you are building. That's where you will find the meaning.

Ask yourself: Who is my organization serving? What difference are we making in the lives of our clients and customers? What are the positive impacts we are having on individuals, families, and communities? How does my work contribute to that positive impact? Tie your job to the mission of your organization, and tie that mission to the beneficial impact your organization is having on other human beings. As you do, your personal meaning will grow.

You can also find meaning in serving your colleagues at work. Your mission can be to mentor others and help them grow. If you watch and listen, you can identify things that other people need, and offer your help. There is meaning in being part of a team whose members help each other as they work toward a common goal.

The difference between a job and a mission applies in family life as well. I reminded myself of the mission when my wife and I were doing all the little things we needed to do for our children. Helping them with homework, filling out their school forms, rushing around to take them to soccer, basketball, ballet, and piano lessons— it took a lot of time, and a lot of planning, to get it done.

No one piece of homework, no one soccer practice or piano lesson may have had much impact. But all of it, week after week, month after month, helped our children to grow, learn new skills,

meet new friends, and understand the world in ways that will benefit them for a lifetime. It's hard to remember all of that when traffic is backed up and you're late for basketball practice and you just realized you forgot your son's knee pads. You have to stop and remind yourself. You have to take a deep breath and reflect on the mission.

Some families adopt their own mission statements. Our family's mission statement, which was up on our wall for many years, is:

1. Love each other.
2. Protect each other.
3. Help each other become all that we can be.
4. Have fun!

I proposed a first draft of our mission statement to get the discussion going. Then we discussed, revised, and adopted it as a family. Our children appended some rules that they knew had Mommy's and Daddy's support, such as no running in the house, no shouting, clean up your own mess, and listen to Mommy and Daddy. We reminded the children of the mission and rules pretty often— especially the “listen to Mommy and Daddy” part! Our children are adults, now, leading their own lives, but the mission still makes sense to me. We still want to love, protect, and help each other— and have fun whenever we can!

Whether at work or at home, your personal meaning will come not with the job or the daily tasks, but with the mission that is fulfilled by your job and daily tasks. Your mission is about the difference that you, your colleagues, and your family members are making in the world. The meaning comes from the difference you are making in the lives of others.

*It is more meaningful to have a mission than a job.*

## Artificial < Natural

**It is more meaningful to enjoy one's place in nature  
than to displace nature.**

“Successful” people often have the money to create their own artificial environments, away from other people, and away from the natural world. They can live insulated lives, in environments designed specifically for them.

It's not that unusual. We humans have been busy creating artificial environments— cities, boulevards, office buildings, homes, and parks. Some of these environments are truly beautiful, while others are truly ugly. Regardless, we keep creating more and more of them, designed for our comfort and convenience. These artificial environments symbolize our success as an economy and a society. In the process, however, we have separated ourselves from the natural world.

Many of us live and work in computer-controlled buildings that are far more comfortable and predictable than the natural environment. We live in cities with few trees or animals or gardens. If there are animals at home, they may be alive, but they are just as likely to be stuffed animals or hunting trophies mounted in the den. If there are flowers in the front office, they may be real, but they are just as likely to be silk or plastic. Instead of the thrill of a radiant sunset, we have the neon lights of the city. We may not even notice the beautiful array of colors that crosses the sky at sunset. We have arranged to have beauty on demand, at the flick of a switch. And why not? We have it in our power to create it.

I admit that I like modern conveniences. When it is hot, I appreciate air conditioning. When it is cold, I appreciate heating systems.

During my college days, I lived in Japan for two years. One

year I lived outside Tokyo in a small apartment attached to a house in an agricultural area where they grew *daikon* (white radish). The windows were paper *shoji* sliding windows that did not seal out the weather. In the winter, the cold crept in, and the temperature inside my room was often below freezing. If there was any water left in the sink at night, it became ice by morning. I studied and slept in an Icelandic sleeping bag that was like a cocoon—it had no zipper, so I had to wriggle into and out of it. It kept me warm, but I could barely move around. When I sat in front of my typewriter, my fingers were so cold I could not always move them over the keys. Needless to say, when spring came, it was the most glorious spring I have ever experienced! I would have liked a more artificial environment— one that kept me a whole lot warmer.

My wife and I have been enriched by visiting extraordinary buildings in great cities like Washington, D.C., Chicago, Paris, London, Barcelona, Lisbon, Bangkok, and Yangon. We have enjoyed the gardens of Versailles in France and Gardens by the Bay in Singapore. We have been amazed at the engineering challenges that were overcome when building the Panama Canal, Hoover Dam, and the St. Louis Gateway Arch. We know that cities can be vibrant places for community, cooperation, and innovation, and their art and architecture can be inspiring.

However, we should not lose our sense of wonder about the natural world in which we live. It is a complex and beautiful world that was here before us, a world that reflects the work of forces far greater than us.

Organized human civilizations are only about 10,000 years old. The first easily identifiable civilization, that of the Sumerians, was established about 6,000 years ago. Our life in our artificial city environments is a comparatively recent event in the life of our species.

Before we moved into our artificial environments, we knew every tree, every bird, every berry. We knew the wind, the clouds,

the rain, and the snow. Some of us— naturalists and members of pre-industrial tribes here and there around the world— still have this knowledge.

The story is told of an anthropologist who traveled to a South Pacific island to study the indigenous people. He reported back that they were indeed primitive, because they had a very inadequate language. For example, they did not have a word for “tree.” Years later, other anthropologists discovered that the reason the indigenous people did not have a word for “tree” was that they had a name for *each kind of tree*— and there were dozens of them. There was no need for an abstract word like “tree” when they had given each species of tree its own name.

Even those of us who are city dwellers benefit from contact with the natural world. Hiking in a Redwood forest, paddling a canoe on a clear lake, and wading into blue-green ocean surf are spiritually refreshing and renewing. Watching a humpback whale breach the ocean surface or an eagle soar above the cliffs is an inspiration. We have not completely forgotten where we came from, but too many of us have been away too long.

When it comes to the natural world, there is no end of things to wonder about. How do plants change sunlight into energy? How do forests produce oxygen for us to breathe? How do the swallows find their way thousands of miles back to Capistrano? How does every member of a school of fish turn at the same moment? How does kelp grow two feet in length in only one day? What makes it possible for an American bison to run as fast as 45 miles per hour for hours at a time? Massive glaciers, the formation of mountains and lakes, the shifting tectonic plates on deep ocean floors— the natural world is fascinating. The more one knows about the natural world, the more one is filled with a sense of wonder.

I found that sense of wonder in the essays of Lewis Thomas that were published as *The Lives of the Cell*. He began by describing how our bodies are occupied by other tiny organisms:

At the interior of our cells, driving them, providing the oxidative energy that sends us out for the improvement of each shining day, are the mitochondria, and in a strict sense they are not ours. They turn out to be little separate creatures... they have maintained themselves and their ways, replicating in their own fashion, privately, with their own DNA and RNA quite different from ours... Without them, we would not move a muscle, drum a finger, think a thought. Mitochondria are stable and responsible lodgers, and I choose to trust them.<sup>46</sup>

Not only do we have little critters living in our cells, we share genes with other life on our planet. Thomas notes that “the resemblance of the enzymes of grasses to those of whales is a family resemblance.”<sup>47</sup> A little more disconcerting, to me, is the assertion by the National Primate Research Centers that Rhesus monkeys, or Rhesus Macaques, are the most commonly used monkeys for preclinical trials because they share about 93% of their genes with humans.<sup>48</sup>

There are simple ways to reconnect with the natural world. For example, a few months ago, my wife Elizabeth and I did something we have never done before: we set up a birdfeeder in our backyard. It was prompted by Elizabeth’s fascination with the golden plover that visits our front yard every year, flying in from Alaska to spend the winter with us in Hawaii. We started talking about birds, and then came the idea of a birdfeeder.

We hung the birdfeeder from the branch of a tree behind our house that Elizabeth can see from her home office. The first bird to show up was a red crested cardinal, and the second was his mate. They were very stately; they seemed to be dancing with each other, a kind of birdly *gavotte*. Then the java sparrows showed up, about a gazillion of them, fluttering up a storm. They crowded onto the feeder and lined up on nearby branches and internet cables. Then came the large, green, rose-ringed parakeets, a beautiful species with long tails. They are an invasive species, escaped from pet cages and now invading farms and harming

indigenous plants. They did indeed invade our feeder, clinging to the sides, fending off the sparrows that surrounded them. Then came a northern cardinal, in brilliant shades of deep red. Hour by hour, day by day, the tableau changed.

But that was not all. We began to see birds everywhere— birds that we had never noticed before. We saw them in neighboring trees. We saw them when we walked our dogs in the park. Elizabeth began to identify their chirps and squawks. In a small way, day by day, the natural world became more alive to us. We had a new connection with life around us, and that connection brings us joy.

This planet is our home. If we knew more *about* our home, we might feel more *at home*, and we might treat our home better. The more we know about the natural world around us, the more we will respect it and seek to become part of it, rather than destroying it with our short-sighted activities. We are in great danger when we ignore the natural systems around us. After all, we depend on those natural systems for our lives.

One of the pioneers in helping us understand how to treat the natural world better was an African-American scientist and inventor, George Washington Carver, who lived from 1864 to 1943. He was born when slavery was still a reality. His mother was purchased by Moses Carver, a white farm owner in Missouri. Shortly after George was born, he and his mother and sister were kidnapped by night raiders who sold them to slave owners in Kentucky. His master, Moses Carver, tried to find all three of them, but was only able to find George. He negotiated with the raiders and was able to get George back by giving the raiders one of his finest horses.

Moses and his wife Susan raised Carver and his brother as their own children. Carver was frail, so instead of working the fields, “Aunt Susan” taught him how to cook, mend clothes, do laundry, take care of the garden, and read and write. His adopted

parents encouraged him to pursue his intellectual interests. Very early, he became interested in plants, and experimented in hopes of finding natural pesticides, fungicides, and soil conditioners. By the time he was ten, the local farmers were calling him “the plant doctor.”

Black students were not allowed at the public school where he lived, so at the age of eleven, Carver left the farm to attend a black school in a town ten miles away. Andrew and Mariah Watkins, an African-American couple, took him in, giving him room and board in return for chores. Mariah was a midwife and nurse, and she taught Carver about medicinal herbs and shared her religious faith. She told him to learn all he could, and then go out into the world and give his learning back to the people. And that is what he did.

After years of moving from town to town and school to school, Carver ended up studying botany at what is now Iowa State University. In 1894, he became the first African-American to earn a bachelor of science degree. Encouraged to stay at Iowa State, he earned a master’s degree in agricultural science. Booker T. Washington offered him a job at Tuskegee Institute, and Carver spent the rest of his life teaching and conducting research there.

Carver wanted to help people. He started by finding ways to help Southern farmers. He knew that planting cotton year after year had depleted the soils. He promoted the idea of crop rotation— growing nitrogen-fixing plants like peanuts, soybeans, and sweet potatoes in order to restore the soil. A few years after planting these crops, cotton could be planted again, with dramatic increases in yield.

One result of crop rotation was that there was suddenly a surplus of peanuts, soybeans, and sweet potatoes. So Carver set to work finding new uses for these crops, including recipes that used them. He is best known for his work on peanuts. He developed more than 300 products from peanuts— food, industrial products,

and commercial products, including milk, cooking oils and salad oil, paper, cosmetics, soaps, and wood stains. He became known as “The Peanut Man.” His most popular publication was “How to Grow the Peanut and 105 Ways of Preparing it for Human Consumption.”

Carver was nationally known and respected. He testified before the U.S. Congress and met with U.S. Presidents. He traveled around the South to promote racial harmony. He traveled to India to talk with Mahatma Gandhi about nutrition in developing nations. But his life’s goal was to provide small farmers with more resources so that they could be more independent. And starting when he was only ten years old, he sought natural solutions, ways to work with nature to enrich soils and grow crops without chemical pesticides or soil conditioners. He sought natural solutions that would not harm natural systems.

Today, the most obvious change in natural systems is the climate. People can argue about why climate change is occurring, but it is clear that it *is* occurring, and we humans are the prime suspects. Glaciers are melting, sea levels are rising; there are more storms, more droughts, and more fires. Increases in temperature affect growing seasons and the behavior of animals. The balance of nature is becoming unbalanced.

According to David Attenborough in his book, *A Life on Our Planet*, the Earth has experienced five mass extinctions of life in its long history, and “a radical change in the level of atmospheric carbon was a feature of all five mass extinctions.”<sup>49</sup> We humans are pushing the planet toward higher and higher levels of greenhouse gases by burning fossil fuels. The carbon in the atmosphere continues to increase.

Meanwhile, we have been busy destroying the natural life of our planet. Wild animal populations have dropped by half. According to Attenborough, “by the end of the twentieth century, mankind had removed 90 percent of the large fish from all the oceans of the world,” breaking down the chain of life in the

ocean.<sup>50</sup> Australia's Great Barrier Reef has lost 50% of its coral populations in the last three decades.

Trees play an important role because they capture and store carbon. It is estimated that today we have 3 trillion *fewer* trees across the world than when human civilization began ten thousand years ago. The world's rainforests have been reduced by half. The forests that remain are fragmented, intersected by roads and farms.

A United Nations report written by 145 experts from fifty countries noted that 75% of all land has been severely altered by human activity, as has 66% of the world's ocean area. "Nature is declining globally at rates unprecedented in human history... Ecosystems are collapsing, and biodiversity is disappearing."<sup>51</sup> Biodiversity is important because it helps stabilize natural systems and reduce our carbon footprint.

According to Attenborough, when he was a boy in 1937, two thirds of the Earth was wilderness. In 2020, it was down to 35 percent. Attenborough calls for a shift to renewable energy, food sources with a smaller environmental footprint, and the "rewilding" of the planet, including both our oceans and our land. We should intentionally "lose" land back to wilderness. Attenborough said:

In losing land to the wild, we gain opportunities for a life-affirming reconnection with the natural world both in distant lands and seas and in our own local environment. In losing our dominance over nature, we gain an enduring stability within it for all generations that will follow.<sup>52</sup>

Pandemics can be caused by our destruction of the environment. Many animal species have carried viruses for tens of thousands of years, if not longer. Some viruses have spilled over into humans when humans interacted with animals or came in contact with animal feces. It is believed that HIV/AIDS was transmitted to humans when a human in Africa ate an infected chimpanzee approximately 100 years ago. More recently, it is believed that COVID-19 originated from bats, with perhaps

pangolins as intermediate hosts.

David Quammen, in his book *Spillover*, said that “Mankind’s activities are causing the disintegration (a word chosen carefully) of natural ecosystems at a cataclysmic rate.”<sup>53</sup> That includes slash-and-burn agriculture, clearing forests, new urban settlements, hunting and eating wild animals, chemical pollution, and nutrient runoff into oceans, all of which are tearing ecosystems apart. These destructive activities are not new, but now we have 7 billion people on the planet, and we are using new, destructive technologies.

Millions of unknown creatures live in ecosystems that are now being destroyed, and those creatures include viruses, bacteria, fungi and other organisms. These viruses, which have in the past stayed in their natural environments, away from people, are now being unloosed into a wider world. There are now more people, closer at hand, who can serve as new hosts for these viruses. And more people today are traveling, so infected individuals can spread a virus very quickly.

Scientists have known for years that there is a critical need for health monitoring and identification of new pathogens in wildlife populations. Quammen said: “*Let’s keep an eye on wild creatures. As we besiege them, as we corner them, as we exterminate them and eat them, we’re getting their diseases.*”<sup>54</sup>

Quammen, writing in 2012, said that there was no reason to think there would not be another global disaster caused by a strange microbe emerging from an animal. He asked: “Will the Next Big One be caused by a virus? Will the Next Big One come out of a rainforest or a market in southern China?” He wasn’t far off. The Next Big One was COVID-19, and it came from Wuhan, China. It is believed to have come from a “wet market.” Wet markets often include live animals kept in cages, stacked on top of each other, defecating on each other. As I write, people all over the world are dying from this relentless virus, the worst since the Spanish flu in 1918-20.

A disease that only exists in humans can be brought under control or even stamped out. However, if the host of the virus is an animal and the host animals are not killed, the virus will still be there, even after it is brought under control by humans, and it can spill over again. For example, there were 25 outbreaks of Ebola between 1976 and 2016, claiming 13,000 lives.

There is thus every reason to believe that there will be *more* spillovers, and *more* pandemics in the future. The likelihood of future pandemics could be reduced if we stopped population growth, stopped the destruction of the natural environment, and reduced worldwide travel. In the meantime, it is likely that there will be more “Next Big Ones” like COVID-19.

The future of the planet depends on our discovery that we are part of nature, not apart from or superior to nature. Every action we take that harms the natural world has a cost— a cost we must pay in pollution, a decrease in species diversity, and the long-term inability of the planet to sustain human life.

There used to be a small exhibit at the Honolulu Zoo the size of a telephone booth. There was a sign outside on top of the booth that said: “World’s most dangerous animal.” When you stepped into the booth, you discovered that you were looking into a mirror. It brought chuckles, but the point was serious. Humans are the world’s most dangerous animals.

As much as we have created, it is far less than the creation all around us— the natural world itself. We are the dominant species, but there are 50 million other species that inhabit our planet. They may be very distant relatives, but we are all related. We belong to a very large family of life. We are part of something bigger than ourselves.

Yes, there is meaning in creating environments that give people pleasure at home and at work. There is meaning in the design and construction of beautiful buildings and boulevards. But our

artificial worlds can cut us off from the natural environment and the inspiration it can provide. We need to be part of nature, not apart from nature. And now, at this time in the planet's history, we need to change our behavior so that all of us can survive. What could be more meaningful than literally saving the planet?

*It is more meaningful to enjoy one's place in nature than to displace nature.*

## Information < Wisdom

**It is more meaningful to have wisdom and know how to live than to have information but not know what to do.**

Having lots of information at our fingertips is a symbol of success. The more information we have, the more successful we feel.

We want access to specialists who have acquired an immense amount of knowledge in their fields. We want access to the latest news and the latest discoveries. We want to track down any tidbit of information that tickles our fancy.

We are impressed by people who can remember the most obscure factoid. We have television quiz shows and board games based on trivia. We are enamored with facts.

Unfortunately, new information is being generated at such a rate that we are nearly drowning in it. It is hard to sort out; it is hard to keep up. There are new discoveries every day. The capacity of our computers to manage data continues to expand, but so does the information that needs to be managed.

It is also getting harder to know what is true or real. Anyone can share anything on the internet, whether it meets the traditional test of truth or not.

There is no question that we live in the information age. Information has become central to our economy and our daily lives. The more we know, the more we want to know. And yet information is just raw material. In and of itself, it isn't useful.

In the nineteenth century, there were anthropologists who believed that if they just collected enough information, the truth would emerge. They collected thousands of pages of notes on people of other lands and filled up warehouses with their artifacts.

But “truth” did not emerge until hypotheses were applied to the data, until judgment was exercised in organizing and analyzing the raw material that was collected.

In his poem, “The Rock,” T. S. Eliot asked: “Where is the wisdom we have lost in knowledge? Where is the knowledge we have lost in information?” We have to apply judgment to turn information into knowledge, and we have to apply values to turn knowledge into wisdom. The personal meaning is found not in the facts, but in the wisdom.

People who focus on the details may not be able to see the big picture, and may not be able to solve problems or understand issues. Details are important, no mistake about it. But they are important *in context*. We need to see the context. Wisdom can give us the context.

What is wisdom? It is the ability to judge what is true or right. It is accumulated philosophic or scientific learning, and the ability to discern inner qualities and relationships. Wisdom is good sense. It is about insight and action.

Scholars Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi and Kevin Rathunde suggest that wisdom has three major dimensions: “It can be seen as a *cognitive process*, or a peculiar way of obtaining and processing information; as a *virtue*, or socially valued pattern of behavior; and as a *good*, or personally desirable state or condition.”<sup>55</sup>

Wisdom includes understanding the enduring, universal truths; understanding which of those truths are most important; and seeing the relationships between different aspects of reality. A wise person is someone who is competent, has practical knowledge based on experience, and is able to reflect on his or her own experience and thinking. A wise person is also able to make commitments to live a certain way, with certain values. Wisdom is the ability to perceive truth, to understand what is important, and to act accordingly.

The combination of knowing and doing is key. It is important to know the truth. But knowing the truth is not as meaningful as *living* the truth. Knowing is good but knowing is not enough. Meaning comes from acting wisely on what you know.

Wisdom is typified by balanced action. A wise person participates in the march of life, standing for something, living that something. When you are wise, you know that it is not your title or position that makes you who you are, but rather your values, experience, reflection, and commitments.

Wisdom has been valued for thousands of years. Sophocles called wisdom “the supreme part of happiness,” saying that “wisdom outweighs any wealth” and “there is no happiness where there is no wisdom.” St. Thomas Aquinas thought that nothing could compare with the happiness that one received from the pursuit of wisdom. Henry David Thoreau encouraged us “so to love wisdom as to live accordingly to its dictates, a life of simplicity, independence, magnanimity, and trust.”

Wisdom is essential to our survival. Thomas Henry Huxley thought that the only medicine for suffering, crime, and all the other woes of mankind is wisdom. Scholars Csikszentmihalyi and Rathunde agree. They write that wisdom is about understanding the world in an even-handed way, seeking the ultimate consequences of events. It is an antidote to selfish, short-term, and limited goals that can have disastrous consequences. Wisdom is a virtue because it provides a compelling guide to action, based on an objective, long-range, organic understanding of consequences. Only wisdom can pull us back from the brink of disaster.<sup>56</sup>

Nelson Mandela and Desmond Tutu exercised wisdom in addressing racism in South Africa. *Apartheid* was institutionalized racial segregation based on white supremacy. It was led primarily by Afrikaners, white South Africans who were descended from Dutch settlers who arrived centuries earlier. The Afrikaners were a minority, but they dominated the country politically, socially, and economically.

Mandela started out as a lawyer and became an anti-apartheid revolutionary who was repeatedly arrested for sedition. He became more radical, eventually leading a campaign to sabotage government facilities. He was arrested and imprisoned in 1962 and was later sentenced to life imprisonment. He spent 27 years in prison. When he was released from prison by President de Klerk in 1990, he negotiated with de Klerk to end *apartheid*. The result was the country's first multiracial general election in 1994. Mandela won the election and became the first black President of the country.

After 27 years in prison, Mandela could have been bitter, desiring revenge against whites in South Africa. Instead, he focused on forgiveness and reconciliation between the country's racial groups. One step that he took was dramatized in the movie, *Invictus*, starring Morgan Freeman as Mandela and Matt Damon as Francois Pienaar, an Afrikaner who was the captain of the South Africa rugby team. Mandela encouraged black South Africans to support the rugby team, the Springboks, when South Africa hosted the 1995 Rugby World Cup. Mandela wore a Springboks cap and shirt at the final match, and when the Springboks won, he presented the trophy to Pienaar. It was a symbolic act that sent a message. The South Africa team was white, but it was *South Africa's* team. It was *everyone's* team.

Mandela promoted the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, which investigated crimes that were committed under *apartheid*, either by the government or by black political activists. He appointed Anglican Archbishop Desmond Tutu to serve as the chair of the Commission. Tutu was a cleric and theologian who was anti-*apartheid* and a human rights activist. He stressed non-violence, consensus-building, and the importance of convincing other countries to apply economic pressure to force political change in South Africa. He became a mediator among rival black factions, and then chaired the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. Starting in 1996, the Commission held hearings for two years, detailing the rapes, torture, bombings, and assassinations that had

occurred during *apartheid*. The work of the Commission helped the country to move away from the past so that it could build a better future.

Mandela and Tutu were both controversial, often criticized by both the left and the right for their actions and beliefs. And the impacts of *apartheid* are still there in South Africa. My wife and I visited Johannesburg a few years ago and found that racial tensions still exist. Afrikaners still hold significant economic power; crime, poverty, and inequality are still widespread; political protests continue. And yet, conditions would be far worse were it not for the wisdom of Mandela and Tutu, who worked hard for forgiveness and reconciliation— efforts that won each of them a Nobel Peace Prize as well as the respect and gratitude of their countrymen.

Wisdom can make a difference in simple ways. The movie *The Straight Story* is based on the life of Alvin Straight, who lived in a small town in Iowa. Alvin was in his declining years and could only walk with the help of two canes. When he learned that his brother had suffered a stroke, Alvin set out to visit him to reconcile their relationship while they were both still alive.

Alvin didn't have a driver's license because his eyesight was too poor. Since he couldn't drive a car, he bought a thirty-year-old John Deere 110 Lawn Tractor, which had a maximum speed of about five miles per hour. He hitched a trailer to the lawn tractor and set off on the 240-mile journey from Laurens, Iowa to Mount Zion, Wisconsin. He drove along the side of the road during the day, and then pulled off the road and camped out at night. During the six weeks of his trip, he touched many lives.

One afternoon Alvin passed a girl who was hitchhiking by the roadside. She wasn't able to get a ride, so that evening she approached Alvin's campfire. He offered her wieners. She snickered at the wieners, and called his trailer a hunk of junk. Alvin had the wisdom to listen, and offer friendship. It became clear that she was running away from home because she was

pregnant and felt ashamed. Alvin didn't judge her or criticize her. Instead, he talked about his own family, and how his daughter missed the children that were taken away from her many years ago. He told the girl that her family might not be happy about her pregnancy, but he didn't think they wanted to lose her.

Alvin told her that when his kids were young, he played a game with them. He gave each of them a stick and asked them to break it. Of course, each of them could break a single stick. Then he tied all the sticks into a bundle and asked them to break it. Of course, none of them could. Then he told them that the bundle was family.

Alvin offered to let the girl sleep in his trailer while he slept outside on the ground, but she said no, thank you, she would sleep outside. She helped him up from his chair by the campfire and he climbed into the trailer to sleep. In the morning when he awoke, the girl was gone. On the ground near his trailer, he found a bundle of sticks neatly tied together. He knew that she had gotten the message and was on her way home. With acceptance and simple advice, he had made a difference in her life.

Exercising wisdom provides us with an important source of personal meaning. Csikszentmihalyi and Rathunde conclude that “wisdom is a personal good, *an intrinsically rewarding experience that provides some of the highest enjoyment and happiness available.*”<sup>57</sup> They point out that wisdom stimulates cultural evolution and provides rewards other than the physical pleasure and materialism that tend to generate social and psychological conflict.

Information is important, but it does not tell us what to do or how to live. Only wisdom can do that. With wisdom, we can act on our knowledge, becoming fully alive and discovering new meaning at every turn.

*It is more meaningful to have wisdom and know how to live than to have information but not know what to do.*

## Living Closely to Your Most Important Sources of Meaning

One of the problems with achieving “success” is that it depends on many variables that we don’t control. We don’t control the world economy, population growth, or the political rise and fall of individual nations. We don’t control the weather, or natural disasters like fires and floods. We don’t control when a pandemic will break out. We don’t control who will get elected and what their policies will be. We don’t control social trends. We don’t control which company will buy which company, and which jobs will open up and which jobs will be eliminated.

We can work hard, and we should; but others work hard, too. We can be intelligent, even brilliant; but others are intelligent, even brilliant, also. If only a few jobs are being handed out, if there are only a few prizes, then there will be some hard-working, intelligent, even brilliant people who will lose out.

The world of careers and rewards is a world defined by scarcity. Only one person is the CEO; only one wins the race; only one gets the award. There is nothing wrong with working for and achieving that kind of success. *Somebody* is going to reach the top, and it might as well be you.

But the higher you go in your field, the more quixotic your fate may be. You may be eminently worthy of a promotion, but your boss is excellent, and is likely to keep his job for many years until he retires. Or your boss may suddenly leave, before you are ready for a promotion, and his replacement may be your age and likely to stay forever. You may become the new CEO just before your company is bought out in a hostile takeover, and you lose your job. You may be appointed to a political position, and then your mayor

or governor loses the election, and you have to find another job. You may face tough decisions, and make them fairly and wisely, but your boss, or your board, or the public may not understand and may want you to be the “fall guy” who gets the blame and the pink slip.

The harder you work, the luckier you will be; the more prepared for success, the more success you will have. But your career success will be affected by accidents and coincidences that have nothing to do with your character, talent, or experience.

In fact, it is often hard to know which events will ultimately be good for us and which will not. I am reminded of the ancient Taoist story about an old Chinese man and his son. Their most valuable possession was a horse. One day the horse ran off. The villagers told the old man that they were sorry for him. “Such bad luck!” they said. The old man just nodded.

A few days later, the horse returned with several other wild horses. The old man and his son put the wild horses into the paddock. “Such good luck!” the villagers exclaimed. The old man just nodded.

The next day, the son tried to ride one of the wild horses, and was thrown off, falling and breaking his leg. “Such bad luck!” the villagers said. The old man just nodded.

Two days later, a contingent of the Imperial Army came through the village, drafting young men into service to fight the northern barbarians. It was expected that few of the soldiers would return. Because of his broken leg, the son was not drafted. “Such good luck!” the villagers exclaimed. The old man just nodded.

And so it goes. It is hard to know how the accidents and coincidences of life will impact us.

Unlike “success,” the meaning that you find in life does not

depend on accidents, coincidences, or uncanny twists of fate. The meaning you find in life depends on *you*. No accident, coincidence, or twist of fate can stop you from finding meaning.

Also, unlike the exclusivity of “success,” meaning is available to everyone. Meaning is about you, your values, and your relationships. It is about the way you live, not about the way others judge you or select you or reward you. Meaning is where you find it, and you can always find it, whether you find “success” or not.

I have been fortunate during my lifetime to have jobs that gave me great meaning. I have not had a typical career. A “head hunter” once told me that I have not had a career at all— just a series of jobs. But each of those jobs was meaningful, and I am grateful to have had each one.

Catherine Bateson, in her book *Composing a Life*, reflected on changes in our culture relating to work, including the difference between men’s careers and women’s careers. She said that a career pattern rooted in myth and folklore is that of a quest, a journey toward a specific end, like the search for the Holy Grail. This has often been the pattern for men’s careers, as they seek to reach the top of their profession or organization.

Women’s lives, by comparison, have often been interrupted by childbearing and evolving family responsibilities. Also, since men often move during their careers, their wives have been constantly uprooted, moving into a new town or city where they have to look for a new job. As a result, they have constantly improvised and reinvented themselves. Their lives have been more like the lives of knights errant, who emerged from the castle each day to discover people or situations that needed their help. Because of changes in our culture and our economy that affect both men and women, Bateson said that “the knight errant, who finds his challenges along the way, may be a better model for our times than the knight who is questing for the grail.”<sup>58</sup>

My own non-career has been more like the knight errant. I always looked for work that I thought needed doing, that I was capable of doing, and that would be meaningful to me. Over the past forty years, I have been an attorney, state government official, high tech park developer, university president (twice), YMCA executive, nonprofit CEO (twice), and full-time speaker and author.

Four times, I led teams that were successful in turning around an organization that was about to fail. Three of those organizations were almost out of money and had only a few more months to live. I believed that the missions of those organizations were important, so it was worth the attempt to save them.

Each time the risk was high. There was the risk that the organization would fail, employees would lose their jobs, and the community would lose the organization's programs and services. For me, there was also the risk that, no matter how well I led the effort, if the organization failed, I would be blamed for the failure, and would have trouble getting another job. Fortunately, in each case our team was able to achieve a "turn around" and give the organization a new lease on life. It was very hard work, but it was extremely meaningful work.

Several times during my non-career I accepted jobs that paid less, and had less power and prestige, than my previous job. That is obviously not what you are supposed to do when you "build a career." But it gave me the opportunity to grow, personally and professionally, and to do some very meaningful work. In one case, it led to a promotion.

In 1979, I joined the State of Hawaii Department of Planning and Economic Development as a Coordinator in the Office of the Director, Hideto Kono. I was hired on a contract basis. My office was next to Mr. Kono's office on the top floor of the building. We worked closely together. In fact, there was a private door between our offices. Much of my work involved ocean resource

development, in which I had a strong interest. I had studied ocean law in law school, had attended law of the sea conferences, and had published articles on the legal regulation of ocean industries.

In 1980, the legislature established the position of Ocean Resources Manager within the department. I decided to apply for the position and was appointed. The position paid less, and the office was literally a hole in the wall, several floors down in the building, away from the Director's office. I lost money, prestige, and status when I took the job, but I was committed to the work. It was an opportunity to help create new jobs in ocean-related industries.

In retrospect, it appears that Hideto Kono was impressed that I was so committed to economic development that I was willing to take a cut in pay, prestige, and status. In any event, in 1981, he nominated me to become a Deputy Director of the department. The Governor agreed, so all of a sudden I was up on the top floor of the building again, working closely with the Director once more, this time as his Deputy and a member of the Governor's sub-cabinet.

Then in 1983, Mr. Kono nominated me to replace him as Director of the Department. The Governor and the State Senate agreed. At the age of 34, I became the second-youngest cabinet member in the State's history. I served as Director until the end of Governor Ariyoshi's term in 1986. I loved working on economic development, and I truly enjoyed working for Hideto Kono and Governor Ariyoshi. I am not sure all of that would have happened if I had not been willing to take a demotion to become the Ocean Resources Manager.

During my non-career, I also gave up work completely for two and a half years in order to go back to school and earn a doctorate in higher education leadership. One month, I was the president of a university. The next month, I was a graduate student in a dormitory at the University of Southern California with a

17-year-old roommate. I am willing to certify that he was the most disappointed freshman in the history of higher education. He traveled from Virginia to California for freedom, and they gave him a roommate older than his father.

People did not understand why I would give up a job to go back to school. They told me: You go to school to get a job, you don't leave a job to go to school. Also, I was 46, which they thought was a little old to be going back to school. But those two and a half years were an extraordinary period of personal and professional growth that laid the foundation for the rest of my working life. It was also special because I had more time with my family, and I even had some time to do some writing.

Dropping out of the world of work is not a normal way to build a career (and not something you should try unless you have a supportive spouse like mine!). One day, when I was at my home office, I got a call from a local reporter. He asked for Kent Keith, and I said yes, that's me. He said that he was doing an article on people whose careers had a meteoric trajectory, and then fizzled. I said, "Oh, who would you like to talk about?" "You," he said. "Me?" I said. "I'm going back to school and learning things I can use the rest of my life. And I will be back in the workplace. I'm still young. I'm not done." I gave him the John Paul Jones "I have not yet begun to fight" speech, which wasn't what he wanted to hear. He said thank you and hung up.

What was I doing when he called? I was working on the draft of *Anyway: The Paradoxical Commandments*. When the book was launched in 2001, it was sold to 21 publishers and translated into 17 languages. I was on the front page of *The New York Times*, featured in *People* magazine and *The Washington Post*, and was interviewed by Katie Couric on the *Today Show*.

I thought about calling that reporter. I wanted to tell him, "Hi, guess what? I *unfizzled!*" But I couldn't remember his name.

I didn't know that the book I was writing would be published, much less become a national bestseller. I didn't know that it would be translated and read all over the world. All I knew was that working on that book was very meaningful to me. It was something that I really wanted to do.

Sometimes, meaning is found in what appears to the rest of the world to be failure. The legend of King Arthur is an example. In *The Once and Future King*, T. H. White describes the efforts of King Arthur to create a new kind of kingdom based on right instead of might. He started the Knights of the Round Table for that purpose— to defend the weak and fight for what was right and good and true. However, for all his hard work and noble dreams, at the end of the story King Arthur has lost his wife and his best friend, and faces death at the hands of an army raised by his illegitimate son. His life is in a shambles. He has failed.

Then, in his camp on the morning of what may be his final day, he discovers a young lad who knows all about the dream. Arthur knights the boy and sends him home, so that he will live to tell the story and keep the dream alive. In *Camelot*, the movie version of the story, Lord Pellinore calls to Arthur to ready himself for battle. "I've already won my battle," Arthur says, watching the boy run toward safety. The dream will live; Arthur's life had meaning.

When you choose meaning, you are making a choice of immense importance. You will no longer be part of the world's craziness. In fact, you can help the world to remember what it means to be sane.

Fortunately, there are millions of people who are not part of the world's craziness. Nearly all are much happier than their neighbors who are still trying to find meaning where it can't be found.

All around the world, for thousands of years, the great spiritual teachers and the great religions have taught people how to live.

Spiritual teachers and religions differ, but some of their teachings are similar. They call to us to value what is spiritual, not secular; what is meaningful, not material. They emphasize love and compassion, and the importance of serving others. They remind us that we do not have to judge ourselves by the world's definitions of success.

We are *in* the world, but we do not have to be *of* the world. We can live by deeper values and reaffirm more fundamental truths. That's where we will find the personal meaning that will sustain us.

Many things that you want to accomplish, especially in your career, require planning and hard work year after year. You must defer gratification, putting off today's pleasures and satisfactions to some future time when your planning and hard work will have paid off. But none of us knows how long we have on this Earth. Each day is a gift; each day should be lived fully. To live fully, you need to find personal meaning. It is not something you can put off. You need it now.

I was reminded of this a few years ago. I was at a fitness center working out on the rowing machine when it happened. After 20 minutes of rowing, everything suddenly changed. I felt dizzy, my chest felt congested, I was short of breath, I was disoriented, I was weak. I stopped, struggled to my feet, walked to the side of the fitness center, and sat down. As the seconds passed, I didn't feel any better. I wasn't recovering. Was it a heart attack? I didn't know what a heart attack felt like, but something had hit me hard in a way I had never experienced, and I was afraid. Was this the end?

"You're looking really pale," the attendant said. I told her how I felt, and she urged me to get myself to a doctor. I did, and it turned out all right. But for those few minutes, I was seized with the thought that my time was up. I would never see my wife and children again, never say the things I still wanted to say, never do the things I still wanted to do. It was a shock, a shock that has

lingered with me.

Nobody wants to be hauled off to the emergency room saying to himself, “I wish I had told her how much I really love her... I wish I had spent more time with my children... I wish I had taken more time to enjoy the little pleasures of life... I wish I had given all I had to give... I wish I had followed my dream... I wished I had helped other people more... I wish I had made the difference I was born to make...”

You can work year after year for “success,” but you cannot put off meaning. You need personal meaning every day, or you are not really living. And you cannot put off really living, because any day could be your last.

Monitor the meaning in your daily life. Was my life meaningful today? This week? This month? Use the Meaning Maximizers as a checklist. Ask yourself:

- Am I living my values?
- Am I giving and receiving love?
- Am I participating in community?
- Do I have intimate moments with friends and loved ones?
- Am I enjoying the richness of life?
- Am I serving others?
- Am I doing my personal best?
- Am I taking care of my health?
- Do I have a mission and am I fulfilling that mission?
- Am I connected with nature?
- Am I growing in wisdom, and using that wisdom?

Step back a little and ask: Overall, is my life meaningful?

When you look at the Meaning Maximizers, you may find that one category, such as love or intimacy, gives you immense meaning, and the other categories are not as important. You may also find that as your life changes, the area that gives you the most meaning may change. There may be a period in which you gain particularly high meaning from your mission at work or your community service, or times when your meaning comes mostly from living your values and exercising wisdom.

You can use the list of Meaning Maximizers, or make your own list. What is important is that you monitor your meaning, to make sure that your overall sense of meaning in life is growing or is already high and continues that way over time. If your sense of meaning is sinking, then it is time to reconsider how you are spending your time and what you are doing with your life.

Many of the most meaningful moments in your life may not be the most obvious ones, like the day you graduated, or got your first promotion, or won an award, or got married, or your first child was born. Those are important events, but there are other moments you may also cherish that may be less obvious.

*After Life* is an intriguing Japanese movie directed by Kore-eda Hirokazu. The story is simple: After people die, they go to a kind of way station before continuing to heaven. At the way station, they have three days to select one cherished memory that they will keep with them for all eternity. In the movie, one man picks his daughter's wedding. Another picks his experience flying in the clouds in a small plane. Still another wants to always remember an afternoon sitting on a park bench with the woman he most truly loved.

If you could pick only one memory, what memory would you pick? Personally, I would have trouble narrowing the choices. But one memory that I would take with me is the memory of sitting at

dinner with my wife and children, talking, laughing, eating, and enjoying the fact that we are together as a family. It is that simple. I find immense personal meaning in just being with loved ones and enjoying our time with each other.

Our commercial, secular society promotes a definition of “success” that brings little meaning. Fortunately, there are many sources of personal meaning that are available to each of us. Those sources of meaning are right there in front of us, waiting for us, every day. We just have to find them and live closely to them. We can do that whether we are suffering hardship or experiencing success. We can do it *anyway*.

One of the benefits of finding personal meaning is that when you look back at the end of your life, you won't have many regrets. That's because you will be looking back on a life filled with meaning. Even more important, you won't wonder why you lived. *You'll know*. And that is a blessing I wish for each of us!

## Self-Reflection on the Meaning Maximizers

How would you rate the amount of meaning that you find by living your values?

*Low meaning*

1      2      3      4      5

*High meaning*

How would you rate the amount of meaning that you find by loving others?

*Low meaning*

1      2      3      4      5

*High meaning*

How would you rate the amount of meaning that you find by being part of a community?

*Low meaning*

1      2      3      4      5

*High meaning*

How would you rate the amount of meaning that you find in intimate relationships?

*Low meaning*

1      2      3      4      5

*High meaning*

How would you rate the amount of meaning that you find by enjoying the richness of life?

*Low meaning*

1      2      3      4      5

*High meaning*

How would you rate the amount of meaning that you find by serving others?

*Low meaning*

1      2      3      4      5

*High meaning*

How would you rate the amount of meaning that you find by doing your personal best?

*Low meaning*

1      2      3      4      5

*High meaning*

How would you rate the amount of meaning that you find by being healthy?

*Low meaning*

1      2      3      4      5

*High meaning*

How would you rate the amount of meaning that you find by having a mission?

*Low meaning*

1      2      3      4      5

*High meaning*

How would you rate the amount of meaning that you find by understanding your place in nature?

*Low meaning*

1      2      3      4      5

*High meaning*

How would you rate the amount of meaning that you find by acquiring and using wisdom?

*Low meaning*

1      2      3      4      5

*High meaning*

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Dr. Kent M. Keith he has served as an attorney, state government official, high tech park developer, YMCA executive, full-time author, president of two private universities, and CEO of two non-profit organizations.

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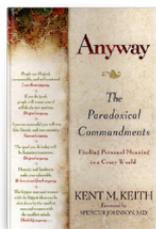
Dr. Keith has given more than a thousand speeches and workshops in the United States and thirteen countries in Europe, Asia, and Africa. He has appeared on more than a hundred TV and radio programs in the United States, the United Kingdom, Japan, Korea, Australia, and Kenya. He is known throughout the world as the author of the Paradoxical Commandments and as a leader in the servant leadership movement. More than 250,000 copies of his ten books have been sold worldwide.

Dr. Keith is married to Dr. Elizabeth Misao Keith, who teaches Japanese language, literature, and culture at the University of Hawaii at Manoa. The Keiths have been married for 44 years and have three grown children.

More information about Dr. Keith is available at [www.carlsonkeith.com](http://www.carlsonkeith.com) and [www.paradoxicalcommandments.com](http://www.paradoxicalcommandments.com). He can be contacted at [drkentkeith@hotmail.com](mailto:drkentkeith@hotmail.com).

## OTHER BOOKS BY DR. KENT M. KEITH

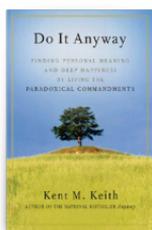
### PARADOXICAL COMMANDMENTS



*Anyway: The Paradoxical Commandments: Finding Personal Meaning in a Crazy World* (G. P. Putnam's Sons, 2002).

In this book, Dr. Keith explains the origin and meaning of the Paradoxical Commandments, which have been used by millions of people all over the world. The commandments are guidelines for finding meaning in the face of adversity. The message is that whatever the world does to us, we still get to choose how to respond, and we can always respond in ways that are meaningful to us. We can find meaning by facing the worst in the world with the best in ourselves.

Available from Amazon.com or  
[www.paradoxicalcommandments.com](http://www.paradoxicalcommandments.com).

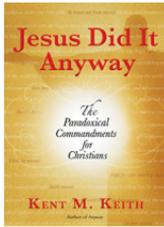


*Do It Anyway: Finding Personal Meaning and Deep Happiness by Living the Paradoxical Commandments* (Inner Ocean Publishing, 2003; New World Library, 2008).

This handbook is a companion to *Anyway: The Paradoxical Commandments*. It describes how people have used the Paradoxical Commandments to break away from their daily excuses, or a painful past, or a complicated present, to find meaning *anyway*. This is a practical “how to” book for those who want to put the Paradoxical Commandments into practice in their own lives. The book includes 40 stories about people who are living the commandments; questions for personal reflection and group discussion; and an interview with the author

in which he answers the questions he is asked most often about the commandments.

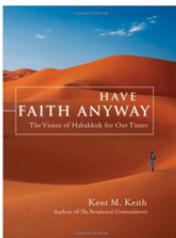
Available from Amazon.com or  
www.paradoxicalcommandments.com.



*Jesus Did It Anyway: The Paradoxical Commandments for Christians*  
(G. P. Putnam's Sons, 2005).

For more than fifty years, the Paradoxical Commandments have been used by Christians all over the globe. Mother Teresa thought they were important enough to put on the wall of her children's home in Calcutta. *Jesus Did It Anyway* illustrates the Paradoxical Commandments through stories and verses from both the Old Testament and the New Testament, the teachings of Jesus and the apostles, and personal anecdotes. The 14-chapter book includes a study guide with questions for each chapter— ideal for discussion groups and Sunday School classes.

Available from Amazon.com or  
www.paradoxicalcommandments.com.



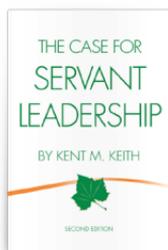
*Have Faith Anyway: The Vision of Habakkuk for Our Times* (Jossey-Bass, 2008).

*Have Faith Anyway* explores the author's new 11th Paradoxical Commandment: *The world is full of violence, injustice, starvation, disease, and environmental destruction. Have faith anyway.* To help the reader better understand what it is like to have faith in the face of seemingly insurmountable problems, the author tells the story of the Old Testament prophet Habakkuk, whose vision of a conversation with God led him to an inspiring affirmation of faith even in the face of devastation and death. The book concludes with Keith's own vision of a conversation between

a Christian and God today. The book includes a Readers Guide for Reflection and Study.

Available from Amazon.com or  
[www.paradoxicalcommandments.com/](http://www.paradoxicalcommandments.com/)

## SERVANT LEADERSHIP



*The Case for Servant Leadership*  
(Terrace Press, 2nd edition, 2012)

*The Case for Servant Leadership* is an easy-to-read introduction to servant leadership. It describes servant leadership as ethical, practical, and meaningful. The book cites the universal importance of service, defines servant leadership, compares the power model of leadership with the service model, outlines some key practices of servant-leaders, and explores the meaningful lives of servant-leaders. The book includes an appendix on servant leadership compared with other ideas about leadership, as well as questions for reflection and discussion. More than 50,000 copies of this book have been sold. It has been used by businesses, government agencies, non-profit organizations, hospitals, and more than forty universities around the United States.

Available from [www.greenleaf.org](http://www.greenleaf.org) or [www.toservefirst.com](http://www.toservefirst.com)

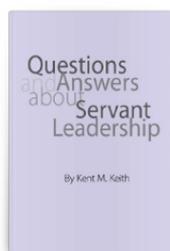


*Servant Leadership in the Boardroom: Fulfilling the Public Trust* (Greenleaf Center for Servant Leadership, 2011)

This book presents and augments the views of Robert Greenleaf on the opportunity of board members of all types of corporations— for-profit and non-profit— to truly lead and make a difference for their organizations and those their

organizations serve. The book provides historical background on the public purpose of all corporations, the responsibilities of board members as trustees for the public good, the unique value of board judgments, the relationship between the board and administration, the role of the Chair, and keys to board effectiveness. The appendix includes key reminders for servant-leaders in the boardroom, a discussion of the shareholder primacy issue affecting for-profit boards, and an overview of servant leadership for those who are new to the subject.

Available from [www.greenleaf.org](http://www.greenleaf.org).



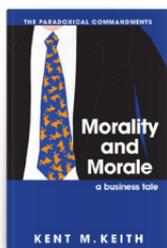
*Questions and Answers about Servant Leadership*  
(Greenleaf Center for Servant Leadership, 2012)

This book shares the questions that Dr. Keith is often asked and the answers that he likes to give when he is making presentations. In some cases, the answers have been expanded for this publication. The book is designed to be especially useful to those who naturally begin with questions, whether they are new to servant leadership or have been on the journey for many years. The book provides the reader with starting points for further study, reflection, and implementation. Where applicable, answers conclude with recommendations for additional reading. A list of all the recommended readings can be found at the end of the text.

Available from [www.greenleaf.org](http://www.greenleaf.org).

## DR. KEITH'S LIBRARY

The following Terrace Press publications by Dr. Keith are now being made available to the general public, at no charge, in the form of PDFs. They may be downloaded at [www.carlsonkeith.com](http://www.carlsonkeith.com). Click on Book Room and then Dr. Keith's Library. Please feel free to download them and share them with others.



### *Morality and Morale: A Business Tale*

(Terrace Press, 2012)

This is a simple story about a young business manager faced with a moral dilemma at work. As he calls on others for advice, he learns that business is a way to serve others; that there is a universal moral code that each of us can follow in our businesses and our private lives; that morality and morale are related, so that when morality goes up, so does morale; that treating others right can be a source of personal energy and can result in business success; and that living morally makes life more meaningful. The book includes Notes for the Reader that provide background for the ideas introduced in the story.



### *Missing the Last Train: A Christmas Tale*

(Terrace Press, 2012)

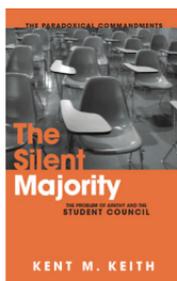
*Missing the Last Train* is a short story about a man who has lost his focus on the most meaningful things in life. Working too late on Christmas Eve, he missed the last train home, and was stuck overnight at the train station with his bag of presents for his children. The station attendant invited him into his small office, and shared “The Four Rules” for finding meaning in life. When the man boarded the first train the next morning, he knew that “The Four Rules” were the Christmas present he needed most.



*The Silent Revolution: Dynamic Leadership  
in the Student Council*

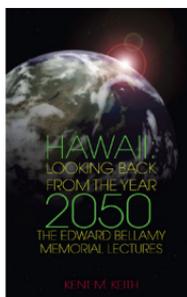
(1968/Terrace Press, 2003)

This is a new edition of the book for which Dr. Keith wrote the Paradoxical Commandments, 149 words that have spread all over the world and have been used by millions of people of all ages and backgrounds. The book was first published in 1968, when Dr. Keith was 19, a sophomore in college. In the book, Keith encouraged student leaders to work together, through the system, to achieve positive, lasting change. He said that student councils can, and should, make a difference. He explained the need to love people, and do what is meaningful and satisfying, whether you get credit or not. He used hypothetical stories to describe practical leadership skills and dilemmas, argued that the “good guys” can win, and urged students to take action now. “Don’t vegetate,” he said. “Initiate.”



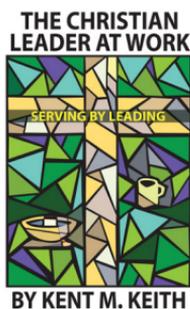
*The Silent Majority: The Problem of Apathy and  
the Student Council* (1971/Terrace Press 2004)

Dr. Keith was 20, a junior in college, when he wrote this book as a companion to his first book, *The Silent Revolution*. Keith said: “*The Silent Majority* is written for high school student council leaders who want to give the student council its noblest meaning and purpose: people helping people.” Keith argued that no one is completely apathetic—everyone is interested in *something*. It’s up to student leaders to find out what their fellow students are interested in, and then link up with those interests. In the process, student leaders will learn more about themselves, and discover the richness of life that is available to those who become “people people.” This is a new edition of the original 1971 publication.



*Hawaii: Looking Back from the Year 2050*  
(1987/Terrace Press 2020)

Dr. Keith has lived most of his life in Hawaii. From 1979 to 1986, he served in the State of Hawaii Department of Planning and Economic Development, where he worked on ocean and energy issues, and then served as Director of the department, responsible for planning and economic development for the state. In 1987, the year after he completed his work for the department, he wrote nine fictional lectures in which he pretended that it was the year 2050 and he was looking back to report on everything that had happened in the previous 75 years. The lectures were titled *Hawaii: Looking Back from the Year 2050*. He said in the 1987 Author's Preface: "Imagining the future is fun. It is also essential. It is essential to think about different futures in order to choose some and avoid others— to define a preferred future and seek to reach it. Also, we may be able to discover ways of solving today's problems by looking at things from a new perspective— that of our grandchildren." In 2020, thirty-three years later, Dr. Keith re-published the lectures, along with a new Author's Preface.



*The Christian Leader at Work: Serving by Leading*  
(Terrace Press, 2015)

This book is for Christian leaders, whether they are leaders in churches, businesses, non-profit organizations, the military, government agencies, schools, or hospitals. Beginning with the importance of faith, the commandment to love, and the call to serve, the book describes the service model of leadership, key practices of servant-leaders, and organizational structures that are based on the teachings of Jesus and the guidance of Scripture. It addresses practical leadership issues such as motivation, leading change, and how to be effective as a leader who is *in* the world, not *of* the world. The book combines the wisdom of the Scriptures with empirical research and experience that supports Biblical teachings. It includes a Study Guide for individual reflection or group discussion.

More information about Dr. Keith and his writing is available at the following websites:

[www.kentmkeith.com](http://www.kentmkeith.com)

[www.carlsonkeith.com](http://www.carlsonkeith.com)

[www.paradoxicalcommandments.com](http://www.paradoxicalcommandments.com)

[www.paradoxicalchristians.com](http://www.paradoxicalchristians.com)

[www.universalmoralcode.com](http://www.universalmoralcode.com)

[www.toservefirst.com](http://www.toservefirst.com)

[www.christianleaderatwork.com](http://www.christianleaderatwork.com)

[www.discoveringservantleadership.com](http://www.discoveringservantleadership.com)

# The Paradox of Personal Meaning



By Kent M. Keith