

After the Teambuilding

July/August 2002

Tips for Maximizing Change Efforts

Rejuvenating Your Future

There is no doubt about it, Frank is in a rut. He is dissatisfied with his job and the rest of his life. Everywhere he looks he is overwhelmed with the sense that his life has lost direction and that his future will be characterized by a plodding sameness.

With this type of mindset, it is time for Frank to take stock - to ask himself some questions. Where is he going? What does he want from life? What does he want to contribute to those around him? How does he want to challenge himself?

We all find ourselves in Frank's place at one time or another. We become too distracted by our day-to-day work or too influenced by outside input to really dwell in these questions. External events - a significant birthday, a downsizing, or a youngest child going off to college - are often the only prompts which nudge us to dig deeper and get out of our rut.

You can use the exercises in this newsletter to take charge of your life without an external event imposing change on you. Counselors, books, coaches and therapists can help you work through these issues, but the exercises in this newsletter may be enough for you to generate insight and begin designing your own future.

The process of rejuvenating your future includes three phases: Phase One: Completion, Phase Two: Education, and Phase Three: Design. This newsletter focuses on Phase One: Completion, which is characterized by completing unresolved issues from the past and "cleaning up." The exercises in this phase free you from the constraints of your past and deepen your connection to yourself so that you can move on. Phases Two and Three are so individualized that this newsletter only touches on them. Reference material for these phases is offered in a Reference and Resources page on the web (see page 2).

Plan on spending some time working with these exercises from Phase One. Even if you don't proceed to phases two and three your time will be well invested.

Phase One

Empty your mind

When you are designing your future, the first thing you need is a quiet mind. Most of us have myriad things racing through our minds. These might include:

- accomplishments
- failures
- past injustices
- missed opportunities
- feelings of being restricted
- grudges

Having all of these things swirl around in your mind degrades the quality of your thinking. To remedy this, I recommend you write in a journal every day for 15 minutes¹. Get a notebook. It doesn't have to be fancy - maybe a spiral notebook or a yellow pad. You probably won't be referring back to this material, so it doesn't matter whether you use the same notebook every day or not. The point is not to be productive in the usual sense, but rather to clear your mind.

Write your thoughts as a stream of consciousness. Put down whatever goes through your head. Whenever your pen stops, force yourself to get it moving again even if you only write "I don't know what to write." Keep a separate sheet of paper handy to capture things to do, ideas for projects; solutions to problems, and other things you will want to act on later.

My personal experience of this exercise was eye-opening. During the first week of writing I filled my notebook with angry thoughts directed at everyone and everything. I was amazed at the pent up, unexpressed emotions and the explicit, vituperative, and scathing language. But as time went on, the anger disappeared. After it was all expressed, it just didn't come out of my pen anymore.

View Yourself As Having One life to Live

Usually we think of our lives as being compartmentalized. We have a family life, a business life, a spiritual life and so on. While you are engaging in this exercise, I recommend that you think of yourself as having ONE integrated life.

If you think of your life as being compartmentalized, then you are likely to think that dissatisfaction in one area of your life has no impact upon your satisfaction in another area of your life. If you hate your job, you might not realize how your feelings about your job affect your home life. If you are sloppy in

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After the Teambuilding

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one of your hobbies, you might feel that it doesn't matter because you aren't getting paid. I assert that it does matter, and that each isolated area affects the whole of your life.

For example, I once knew a dissatisfied and frustrated consultant. She worked for a small firm and did not get assigned the kind of work she wanted. She insisted that she was qualified, but met with resistance from the partners.

At the same time, she started singing with a cho-

"Some people are molded by their admirations, others by their hostilities."

Elizabeth Bowen, *The Death of the Heart* (1938), 2.2

rus. She used a journal to empty her mind every day, and while she was writing she noticed that she was not participating in the chorus as if her singing made any difference to the group. She viewed herself as just one out of 100 singers.

She decided to pursue excellence in the chorus. She practiced every day. After a while, it became unacceptable to her to be less than excellent in any area. The quality of her work improved. Her clients sang her praises. Each of the partners assigned her more interesting and challenging work.

Nobody knows what affect one area has on others, but I have found that happiness, excellence, dissatisfaction, or sloppiness will spill over from one area of life to another. As you do your daily writing practice, you may observe how one area of your life is affecting another. If you are stuck in one area and can't think of what to do, try tackling another more accessible area of your life, as the consultant in my example did. You will experience your own brand of this phenomenon.

Walk

While you are designing your future, I suggest you walk for about a mile a day, adding this to your current regimen whatever that might be. Be with yourself while you walk. Don't listen to tapes or the radio. Let your mind wander; listen to the rhythm of your breath. Feel your heartbeat. Get acquainted with your body and observe your surroundings.

Walking as a form of exercise is a valuable way to develop mental discipline. If you keep your circulation going and your body strong and flexible, you will be more adaptive to change and you will keep a clearer head.

Get things complete

Your writing practice will inevitably yield a list of things you have been meaning to do, you have

promised others you will do, or you know you should do. You will also come up with things you have started and not finished. It is time either to finish them, apologize for not doing them, make a new pledge for finishing them, or declare that you will NOT do them. Even if you think the other person forgot all about the item, it will truly work for you to make it explicit that you aren't going to do it, or you are and by when.

This includes cleaning up your environment. Is your desk a mess? Your car? Are your bills unpaid? Do you have credit card accounts you don't use? Do you have broken equipment, appliances, or other things that you should either repair or get rid of? What about your closet? Are your clothes clean and well fitting or do you have old, ill fitting, out of style clothes in your closet? (For help, contact the National Association of Professional Organizers at www.napo.net.³)

By this time, you will probably notice that you are much lighter in spirit. As you clear the decks, complete things, and empty your mind of the past, you may find yourself happier. It may be easier for others to be with you. Grudges you have held onto for years might fall away as you gain perspective. Your job, family, and neighbors are the same, but you are different – more focused, more centered.

Phase Two: Education

Now that you have cleared the decks and unclogged the systems, you have some freedom to begin looking in earnest for how you want to design your life. In Phase Two, you are educating yourself in order to expand your understanding of yourself and the world around you. This is where the questions come in. What do you want from life? What do you want to contribute to those around you? How do you want to challenge yourself? You can use your journal to explore your own thoughts, but you will also want to include some outside source materials at this point.

If you are thinking of changing jobs...

It could be that you don't like the work you do or it could be that you don't see a future for yourself in your company. Take the time to evaluate your strengths and weaknesses and how well you are matched to your current job. The book "What Color Is Your Parachute?"⁴ is perfect for this type of evaluation. Revisions over the years have kept this book up to date with the latest information. If you read the book through and do the exercises, you will get a comprehensive picture of what you need from your work and what might be missing from your job.

If you are still unmotivated...

You may be stuck in something Dory Hollander,

PhD. calls the "doom loop." Take the time to read her book, "The Doom Loop System, A Step-by-Step Guide to Career Mastery,"⁵ and learn the quadrants of the doom loop. This will guide you as you frame your goals.

If people say you have an attitude problem...

OR if you find yourself generally frustrated even after doing these exercises, look into some weekend courses designed to get to the source of your frustration. I recommend the "Landmark Forum"⁶ offered in most metropolitan areas.

If things are not challenging ...

"Every occupation — whether it is engineering, medicine, law, or management — uses certain aptitudes. The work you are most likely to enjoy and be successful in is work that uses your aptitudes. For example, if you are an engineer but possess aptitudes not used in engineering, your work might seem unrewarding. On the other hand, if you lack the engineer's aptitudes, your work may be difficult or unpleasant."⁷ Check out the Johnson O'Connor Research Foundation for more information on this.

Poke around and do some other reading to fully rejuvenate your future. This web site includes a resource page with links to other sites, suggested reading, and other models to consider. It will change from time to time as new articles and sites are discovered.

The phases of completion and education should help you to develop some clear goals. Then it is time for Phase Three, "Design." Check the web site for project design materials and other helpful documents.

Resources and References

The resource page for this newsletter is at www.jenniferguy.com. These and other resources are listed there.

¹ The Artists Way at Work: Riding the Dragon. By Mark Bryan with Julia Cameron and Catherine Allen. Quill Press; June 1999

² First Impressions: A daily dose of inspiration. www.fastcompany.com

³ National Association of Personal Organizers: www.napo.com

⁴ What Color is Your Parachute? by Richard Nelson Bolles. Ten Speed Press, Berkeley, Calif. ASIN: 0898150477; (July 1981)

⁵ The Doom Loop System: A Step-by-Step Guide To Career Mastery, by Dory Hollander, Ph.D. Viking Press; ASIN: 067084229X; (December 1991)

⁶ The Landmark Forum: weekend course information at www.landmarkeducation.com

⁷ The Johnson O'Connor Research Center: aptitude testing (<http://members.aol.com/jocrf19/contents.html>)

From time to time, we will add to these resources, check in periodically for updates. All of the other issues of "After the Teambuilding" are available on the site as well.