

LEADERSHIP, COACHING AND MENTORING –PACK

February 2021

(15th Anniversary Year editions)

2006 - 2021

Welcome to this month's edition and here are the highlights:

'The day you thought you'd have.' From Damian Piper our Reliance Coach. When I read Damian's, blog post I thought: I wish I had read his article before I had a similar experience and the next time I have similar day, I am going to practice his five steps. The first step is to breathe. Strangely my wife is always suggesting I breathe when I am under pressure. A must read!

6 Domains of Resilience. **Rebecca Alexander from 'The Coaching Studio** has written exclusively for us: "The past year has been challenging for us all, and the question I've heard most often when coaching teams and individual clients has been 'how can I improve my emotional wellbeing?' In my search for answers, I dug into the field of resilience. In the past 20 years there has been an explosion in resilience knowledge – what it is, how it functions, and how to develop it....." Thank you, Rebecca your article has certainly helped me, to better understand my resilience and wellbeing.

Impact Management. By Meike Beckford "I have recently started a new role as Head of Impact Management for the Thera Group (www.thera.co.uk), which is an exciting new role for me and the Group. A common theme from messages of congratulations from colleagues, family and friends was "don't really know what that is or what you'll be doing, but I'm sure you'll be great!" Whilst I appreciated the vote of confidence, it also told me what my first priority had to be – working out what I was doing and telling everyone else what that was!". Be honest did you know what Impact Measurement or Management was all about until today? If you were unsure like me? I highly recommend Meike's article to you.

Patience is a Leadership Virtue. Bettina is a woman who copes with a learning disability & autism and I am her proud Dad. Over the years Bettina has developed an inner calm and a capacity to accept and/or tolerate delay, problems, or suffering without becoming annoyed or anxious. A coping mechanism that helps her make sense of a world that constantly changes and throws unexpected drama and disruption into her structured. This month's article includes the lessons I have learned from Bettina about her endless patience, especially during Covid19. Which brings me to a final article from me '**Do the work you were always meant to do**' a career I started 25 years ago thanks to Bettina.

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It's not about how good you are

It's how Good You want to be

The day you thought you'd have

The day was going to be a great one. Sun not yet risen, a decent pot of coffee brewing whilst putting some thought into how I'd spend the next 10 hours of my life. No meetings planned. Time to recuperate and recalibrate whilst working on a range of projects which would fall into the Important/Not Urgent Category.

Working my way through my morning routine one of the things I do is check my various inboxes. There it was. A mail to change the course of the day. A heads-up of some technical issues meaning problems with e-mail. What then happened was 8 to 10 hours of frustration dealing with tech support departments to resolve the issues. Irksome.

Expectation Versus Reality

This was a great example of expectation versus reality. My expectation (the day I'd like) bounced by real events (email service provider 'upgrade' causing problems). The expectation is the thing I create. And therefore, the thing I have most influence over. This isn't me saying don't have high expectations. Just make sure they are managed when they come into contact with real events. Rationally most people will probably accept this point. Although in the moment, when things happen you don't like, it's easy to get caught out. I know I do. Having an approach to help manage the gap between expectation and reality is something worth considering. Here's an approach to experiment with.

Five Steps towards objective managing

Much of the frustration I felt that morning was me projecting into the future about the impact of events in an unhelpful way. Some of this is down to the way we are wired. Wanting to neutralise threats and risks wherever possible. We all have our own thresholds here. Depending on the severity of the situation being faced we can become paralysed to think rationally and objectively. Catastrophising what may happen. In the vast majority of situations, the quicker we can shift our thinking away from this the better. Visualising can be a powerful tool. We need to make sure we know how to use it to our advantage though. Creating an approach to handle a situation in the moment can be hard. Part of our brains doesn't want you thinking objectively. In fact, it will look to deliberately shut that down. With practice, we can manage that situation. Following the five steps below could help.

1. Breathe. Sounds too basic? In pressure situations, our breathing changes. Often becoming shallow and short. This doesn't serve us. Consciously slowing your breathing down can really help calm your thinking and help you become more objective. There are many techniques to help with this. Personally, I've found real benefit over the years with Box Breathing. Breathe in through your nose for 4 seconds, hold for 4 seconds, breathe out through your mouth for 4 seconds, hold for 4 seconds and repeat. A few rounds of that can really help.
2. Establish and assess the actual facts of the Situation. The keyword here is facts. Not what you imagine is happening or might happen. A fact that we will often need to accept is what you thought you'd be doing has changed. Avoid skipping over this fact.
3. Consider your Options to manage and (hopefully) improve things. This is where you can become more imaginative about deciding a course of action.
4. Consider what Risks might get in the way of what you'd like to happen. How might you mitigate them? Or is it a case that you need to accept or tolerate the risk?

5. Decide what Action you need to take. And then, of course, take it. Get really clear about what this is. Vague actions increase the load on our brains.

Steps 2 – 4 I remember by the mnemonic SORA. As a situation develops running back over the steps based on the results you see can also be helpful. The great thing about SORA is that it's universal. From e-mail servers going down, to train cancellations, to coping with a 5-year-old that won't put their shoes on.

I hope your days are filled with expectations that are met. If not, Try SORA as a way to help you manage. It might just improve the outcomes you're able to achieve.

Damian Piper

Change coach and consultant

He who doesn't notice whether it is winter, or summer is happy. - Anton Chekhov

6 Domains of Resilience

The past year has been challenging for us all, and the question I've heard most often when coaching teams and individual clients has been 'how can I improve my emotional wellbeing?'

In my search for answers, I dug into the field of resilience. In the past 20 years there has been an explosion in resilience knowledge – what it is, how it functions, and how to develop it. Overall, resilience can help us to stay calm, stay focused on our goals, and to build better relationships and better sleep and health habits. Even better, there are many achievable ways to increase our own resilience.

What is resilience?

Resilience helps us to turn adversity into advantage – not only do we bounce back from setbacks, we move forward. This is what enables us to lead a meaningful and fulfilling life, despite the challenges we face.

Resilience isn't just important for the 'big stuff' in life – major changes, loss, upheaval. It's just as important for the small stuff – work stress, daily challenges and frustrations and so on. A great way to check your resilience level is to gauge your response to these small stressors. On a good day, when your resilience is high, you can most likely shrug or even laugh them off, and get on with your plans. But when resilience is low, those small frustrations can feel like impossible setbacks, and it can take time to get back on your feet. It's a tell-tale sign that your resilience is not where it could be. The great news is that our resilience level isn't static, we can work on and improve it.

A tale of two brains

Our brains are equipped with a great warning system which enables us to spot threats and respond quickly. This is the limbic system or 'impulsive brain', and its default reactions to stress are 'fight, flight or freeze' – great if you're on the savannah facing an animal predator, but fairly hopeless for a typical workday problem such as IT failure, bad traffic, or an irritable (or irritating) boss. This is when we need our 'smart brain' - the area in our prefrontal cortex known for its decision-making and reasoning capacities. Much of resilience training is about downregulating our limbic system and upregulating our smart brain. So, how do we do it?

The six domains

Research identifies six key areas which make up resilience. Whatever your level, undertaking small daily activities in each domain can vastly improve your resilience, and I've included some suggestions below.

Vision

We're at our most positive when we have clear goals which we're actively working towards and which don't conflict with each other. Conversely, without clear goals we can feel frustrated and demotivated, and small things can easily knock us off course. Vision provides a bigger picture – something to inspire and motivate us even when the day-to-day is tough. So a starting point for raising resilience is to set clear and meaningful goals, however small. How you do this is up to you. You could work with a goal-setting app, with a buddy, with a manager or with a coach. Aim to identify one or two goals that feel authentic to you and which would make a positive impact on your life. Then start taking the steps you need to reach them.

Composure

When we're composed, we're better able to stay calm in the face of difficult situations. It helps our smart brain to turn down the volume on our pesky limbic brain – a keystone of resilience. A bit like a muscle, composure takes regular practice so that it's there for us when we need it, but it need only take a few minutes. Composure strategies include deep breathing techniques, labelling emotions, finding activities that calm and relax you, and challenging negative thinking. Find one or two habits that appeal to you and aim to practice them daily.

Reasoning

This domain is all about our ability to anticipate, plan and problem solve. The best way to expand this capacity is by widening our knowledge – through reading, training courses or podcasts – and working on our strengths. You could also hold a forward planning session with your team to help you all rehearse some problem-solving skills.

Tenacity

This is what many people think of when they think of resilience - the ability to stick with a goal even when it's tough. A great approach is 'realistic optimism', when you know the path will be tough, but you're hopeful regardless. Research shows this is a more successful outlook than blind optimism or total negativity. If you're struggling with motivation, try the '5, 4, 3, 2,1, GO!' method. Start a countdown on the agreement with yourself that when you reach GO! you will do it.

Collaboration

We are social beings and few things boost our resilience as much as the support and connection of those around us. Covid restrictions might mean we have to be physically distant, but we can still be socially close. Make time to connect with others and show extra patience and understanding as many people are struggling right now – even if they're hiding it. Perhaps reach out to someone you haven't been in touch with for a while and say hello. Asking for and offering support is another way to deepen existing relationships.

Health

This is a new addition to the study of resilience, as researchers continue to uncover the huge impact our physical health has on our mental health. I'm not going to lecture you on how to improve your physical health – you probably already have a good idea of what you're doing well and where you could improve. One of my fellow coaches uses the SHED acronym as a handy reminder of the key areas – Sleep, Hydration (water, not alcohol!), Exercise and Diet. Take an honest look over your schedule and identify one or two small positive changes you can make today.

Even if you choose only one of the six domains to work on, you'll notice your resilience levels improve. Research suggests that the Vision domain is the most important, so it can be a good place to start. But listen to yourself and work out what feels most manageable for you right now. Follow the philosophy of small solutions – transformation doesn't always need require big and daunting steps. Small, daily changes are easier to incorporate and have a huge impact over time.



For more advice and suggestions, try www.home.hellodriven.com – from the creators of the Six Domain model. The same organisation also offers a resilience app if you fancy a deeper dive and daily reminders for your resilience journey.

Rebecca Alexander

'leadership coach and facilitator at The Coaching Studio'



Impact Management

I have recently started a new role as Head of Impact Management for the Thera Group (www.thera.co.uk), which is an exciting new role for me and the Group. A common theme from messages of congratulations from colleagues, family and friends was “don’t really know what that is or what you’ll be doing, but I’m sure you’ll be great!” Whilst I appreciated the vote of confidence, it also told me what my first priority had to be – working out what I was doing and telling everyone else what that was!

What is impact?

Simply put, impact is having an effect, or making a difference, through an activity, project or other action. It is a noticeable change. It is also the reason many of us do things, such as choosing a certain career, or volunteering for a cause, we want to make a difference for someone or something; however cheesy that may sound!

How do we know we are having an impact?

This is where impact measurement comes in – using data and information that tells us what difference we have made. That could include a range of things like the numbers of people attending an event, measures of people’s attitudes or wellbeing before and after a project, or personal stories where people reflect on their journey and the changes they have experienced. There is of course lots of good practice and research out there on the best ways to get this information, the most reliable methods and questions etc. Then there’s the question of how you collect, process and use the data to translate it into information you can understand.

What then is impact management?

Measurement is a big part of impact – you may think you are making difference by doing x, but do know that’s the case? Impact measurement allows you to be more confident in knowing what you are doing and where to focus your efforts. But you can take this further – going beyond just a retrospective ‘did it work?’ to thinking proactively about and planning for impact. We can ask:

1. What impact do we want to have?
2. How do we think that will happen?
3. How will we know that has happened?

The first question feeds into and strengthens your strategic planning. Thinking about the end result and the wider impact that is intended to have, helps you focus on the key measures that will really make a difference. Using the 2nd and 3rd questions, you can then take your strategy from just an aspirational statement or picture of an ideal future, to a considered and manageable plan to actually make it happen and check that it did. Building in measures to check whether we are having the effect we hope is also a brave thing to do – it’s easier to just focus on and celebrate the inputs – all the efforts you and your team are putting in – than to make yourself open to hearing what may be uncomfortable feedback and results if you’re not quite as great as you think you are.

So why do impact management?

If it is harder, and scarier, that continuing with business-as-usual, why make the effort? Here are my first thoughts, impact management enables us to:

- Actually achieve our vision and mission
- Make a real difference for people
- Understand what works and what doesn’t
- Be leaders and innovators in the sector and beyond

- Challenge ourselves to improve
- Win funding, tenders and contracts
- Build a positive profile
- Create new opportunities

Impact management is more than 'nice to have'. If you are serious about achieving your organisational mission, you need to know whether what you're currently doing is working. Where it is, great – share that so others can benefit; celebrate it with your teams; and use it to evidence why you should be funded/supported to do more of this great work. Where it's not working as well as you hoped, that's ok too – use it to learn where you can get better; involve everyone in finding new ways to understand a problem and tackle it differently; create opportunities for change and innovation.

Embedding a culture of impact management in your organisation means embedding a culture of continuous learning and improvement – you will never get it all right and there will always be more you can do. What used to work may also change as issues evolve. Embrace that and enjoy the process of learning and developing together with everyone involved in and touched by your organisation, on your shared journey to making a difference.

And my last piece of advice (based on all of 3 weeks' experience in the role, but it's what I have to keep reminding myself!) – start small. I have found that it's easy to get caught up in so many exciting ideas and see the very best examples of rigorous research and well-developed impact programmes and think you need to do it all now. Start with the basics in the 3 questions I list earlier and perhaps just one measure for each of your key impact goals. You can learn and build from there.

I look forward to seeing the impact you make. Good luck!

To read more on social impact, try:

- www.goodfinance.org.uk/measuring-social-impact
- www.communityscot.org.uk/social-impact-pledge/what-social-impact/
- www.researchtoaction.org/2016/02/what-do-we-mean-by-impact/
- <https://impactmanagementproject.com/>
- www.inspiringimpact.org/

To learn about Thera's impact so far, check out our Social Impact Reports, including the recently published 2019-20 report: www.thera.co.uk/investors/

Connect with me on twitter to hear more sporadic ramblings on impact: [@MeikeB88](https://twitter.com/MeikeB88)

“Watch with glittering eyes the whole world around you because the greatest secrets are hidden in the most unlikely places.” - Roald Dahl

Amanda Gorman reads inauguration poem, 'The Hill We Climb'

When day comes, we ask ourselves,
Where can we find light in this never-ending shade?
...when day comes, we step out of the shade aflame and unafraid.
The new dawn blooms as we free it.
For there is always light. If only we're brave enough to see it.
If only we're brave enough to be it.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LZ055illiN4> (in full)



Being Bettina's Dad. Patience is a Leadership Virtue – Steve Raw

I look out of my window and I wonder when this will be all over and I will get my life back. I think about going back to my work at the garden centre, seeing the animals I care for at the farm I visit each week, going on holiday to Devon this year (I missed going last year) and going on a steam train on the heritage line from Whitby - my parents promised. I know these things will happen again if I am patient. I am good at being patient, I must be.

These are the thoughts I imagine Bettina has as she stares into our back garden this morning.

Over the years Bettina has developed an inner calm and a capacity to accept and/or tolerate delay, problems, or suffering without becoming annoyed or anxious. A coping mechanism that helps her make sense of a world that constantly changes and throws unexpected drama and disruption into her structured. Bettina copes with autism and a learning disability and the recent pandemic is one more challenge that she needs to see through patiently.

Joyce, her mum has put up posters on her wall which list all the activities in her week which are either open or closed due to Covid19 and, once more, Joyce has had to change them to 'closed'. Bettina walks into her bedroom, looks at the poster and puts her hand against her forehead and says, "not again". I marvel at Bettina's patience and resilience, after a few minutes of reflection she comes out of her bedroom and says, "Whitby holiday August?".

"Rivers know this: there is no hurry. We shall get there some day."

A.A. Milne, *Winnie-the-Pooh*.

If you are a regular reader of the 'Being Bettina's Dad' series, you will know how much I learn and am inspired by Bettina. An enchanting person who shares her life with her family and those who are significant in her life. People who are involved in her life regularly tell us how much Bettina has changed their outlook. I can understand why.

Related: <https://leadershipintheraw.org/2018/10/18/being-bettinas-dad-enchanting-by-being-fascinating-and-delightful/>

Watching Bettina look out of the window this morning moved me to write about her endless patience and what I have learned about this virtue. A virtue we can and need to practice if we want to succeed and meet our aspirations both at work and in our personal lives.

"Patience is the ability to know when to act." Catherine Pulsifer

So, what have I learned from Bettina's endless patience and as a family how we have learned to be patient, to support Bettina to have her best life?

Bettina's Patience Tactics

Bettina will:

- Play the long game, having a goal or a wish in mind and then regularly remind you so you have no excuse for forgetting what she wants to experience.
- Look to distract herself from the thing she is currently obsessing about as she knows in her heart this is (temporarily) unavailable for whatever reason, such as going to the cinema, so she will find an alternative such as reading a book or watching a DVD.
- Seek out those she trusts and who always deliver (eventually).
- Be mindful and slow down her world so she can stay in the moment – she is doing this in the picture at the start of this story.
- Observe what is going on around her - constantly scanning the room and her audience for their body language, their tone of voice and the assurances she is receiving.

Bettina's Five Patience Lessons I have adopted from Bettina

1. Have a vision of where you want to get to but know it will take time.
2. Recognise that there will be bottle necks and setbacks and this is to be expected before you get to where you want to be.
3. Don't be surprised when you don't get it right first time.
4. Failure is ok. It makes you stronger and you become more determined.
5. Believe in yourself because you have done it before. "There is nothing new under the sun, but there are new suns." — Octavia E. Butler

How we as her family have supported Bettina to be patient so she can have her best life

Bettina has been her family's world for over 30 years - she really does 'rock our world' but no surprises, it has not always been plain sailing for her family. To describe Bettina's early years is probably easier if I suggest you watch Lilo & Stitch in a 2002 American animated film produced by Walt Disney. Up until she was at least 10 years old Bettina was "Stitch".

As a family we needed to be patient everyday as she struggled to communicate how she was feeling. Bettina struggled to sleep at night. I am not sure we had a full nights sleep until she was in her teens

and it was fortunate for us that Joyce has a great turn of speed over 100m to enable her to catch Bettina as she attempted to run off after something which has attracted her attention.

So how did we exercise our patience skills?

- By working on a plan together as soon as we had a diagnosis for Bettina (and not deviate from the plan so there is always consistency for 'B')
- We had faith in Bettina that she would come through the worst at some point and we just had to be patient and not expect her to meet all the milestones her big sister had met at the same ages.
- We had faith in ourselves that we would remain strong and resilient for Bettina no matter what obstacle was placed in front of us – e.g. obstruction and negativity from so called “professionals” in her early years.
- Making marginal gains, long before Sir David Brailsford articulated this for the British Olympic cycling team. We broke down everything we could think of that Bettina needed to develop such as her communication and her reading skills then try to regularly improve by a small percentage, when you put them all together we could see significant progress. Bettina has surpassed all our hopes and dreams we had for her when she was a young child.
- Not waiting until Bettina had accomplished her milestone before we celebrated (and continue to celebrate) each day of her life and our time together

Summary

I have recently returned to the company I have worked for over 11 years, following a 14-month secondment (doing something completely different.) I see so much has developed and know there is so much more to do over the coming years. As I sit watching Bettina, as she looks out the window, I know that I will have to be patient with myself and follow Bettina's example.

Thanks Bettina!

When you do learn to stretch your patience, the rewards and joy of knowing you are in control of your emotions will be more than worth it.



In the depth of winter, I finally learned that there was in me an invincible summer

“Albert Camus

My Top 3 Picks from Ted.com

Each month I trawl Ted.com (and sometimes YouTube) for presentations that I think will inspire you and are thought provoking, so you don't have too. Here are my recommendations this month:

https://www.ted.com/talks/matthew_williams_special_olympics_let_me_be_myself_a_champion

How much do you know about intellectual disabilities? Special Olympics champion and ambassador Matthew Williams is proof that athletic competition and the camaraderie it fosters can transform lives, both on and off the field. Together with his fellow athletes, he invites you to join him at the next meet — and challenges you to walk away with your heart unchanged.

https://www.ted.com/talks/judson_brewer_a_simple_way_to_break_a_bad_habit

Can we break bad habits by being more curious about them? Psychiatrist Judson Brewer studies the relationship between mindfulness and addiction — from smoking to overeating to all those other things we do even though we know they're bad for us. Learn more about the mechanism of habit development and discover a simple but profound tactic that might help you beat your next urge to smoke, snack or check a text while driving.

Judson Brewer Mindful addiction doctor Psychiatrist and addiction expert Judson Brewer researches mindfulness techniques that effectively help quell cravings of all kinds

https://www.ted.com/talks/kelly_mcgonigal_how_to_make_stress_your_friend

Stress. It makes your heart pound, your breathing quicken and your forehead sweat. But while stress has been made into a public health enemy, new research suggests that stress may only be bad for you if you believe that to be the case. Psychologist Kelly McGonigal urges us to see stress as a positive and introduces us to an unsung mechanism for stress reduction: reaching out to others.

As you grow older, you will discover that you have two hands: one for helping yourself, the other for helping others”
Audrey Hepburn

Don't 'Buy' Growth – Do This Instead...

Time to read: 35 seconds

Dear Steve

When it comes to growth, performance and productivity, many organisations still take this as a starting point - 'we need to grow by x% despite these very challenging times, and so we need our people to...'

And it's perfectly logical for business leaders to think in terms of, in effect, 'buying' growth.

Indeed, this approach only has one slight flaw: it doesn't work.

The evidence is clear – disengagement, overwork and fear making mental illness at work – in all its forms – an epidemic, and not just as a human and ethical issue, also a legal cost.

It's not these organisations or their leaders fault, of course – its what's been driven into them by academics, consultants and finance experts for many years.

There is a proven alternative:

Instead of putting growth first, put people first.

Reverse the traditional approach of wrapping your people around your organisation, by wrapping your organisation around your people.

Unleash all the strengths, passions and genius in all of the people that you already have, to be the very best that they already are.

Then growth, performance and productivity will look after themselves.

With my love and best wishes

David

(David Taylor author of the Naked Leader books)

Positive Perception: Why You Should Filter the Way You See the World

By [Shawn Achor](#) | February 10, 2021

1. In one of psychology's best-known experiments, volunteers watch a video of two basketball teams—one wearing white shirts, one wearing black shirts—passing around a basketball. As they watch, the volunteers have to count the number of times the white team passes the ball. About 25 seconds into the video, a person in a gorilla suit walks straight through the action for five seconds.

2. Afterward, the viewers write down the number of passes and answer a series of additional questions, such as, *Did you notice anything unusual in the video?* When psychologists tried this out on 200 people, 46 percent of them completely missed the gorilla. When the researchers later told them about it, many of them refused to believe they'd missed something so obvious and demanded to see the video again.

3. Why did so many of them fail to see it the first time around? Because they were so focused on counting passes, their neural filters had simply dumped the gorilla sighting right into the spam folder. This experiment highlights what researchers call *inattention blindness*, our frequent inability to see what is often right in front of us if we're not focusing directly on it. In essence, **we tend to miss what we're not looking for.**

4. This selective perception is also why, when we are looking for something, we see it everywhere. You've probably experienced this a million times. You hear a song once, and suddenly it seems like it's always on the radio. You buy a new style of shoe, then everyone is wearing them. Of course, nothing has actually changed in these scenarios—except your focus.

5. Try this little experiment. Close your eyes and think of the colour red. Now open your eyes and look around the room. Is red popping out everywhere? Assuming elves didn't repaint your

furniture while your eyes were closed, your change in perception is due only to your change in focus.

6. **Related:** [How Positivity Makes You Healthy and Successful](#)

7. Instead of creating a cognitive pattern that looks for negatives and blocks success, we need to focus on training our brains to scan the world for opportunities and fresh ideas. When our brains constantly scan for and [focus on the positive](#), we profit from three of the most important tools available to us: happiness, gratitude and optimism.

This article originally appeared in the [March/April 2021 issue of SUCCESS magazine](#).

3 Brave Actions Organisations Must Do Now

Time to read: 45 seconds

Dear Steve

Caused by and combined with Covid, thousands of people are socially isolated and suffering from mental stress, while their organisations face growing economic challenges and uncertain futures.

The solution in many companies is to make people work longer and harder.

The bad news is that solution is not working - never has and never will.

The good news is there is an alternative – it's brave, bold and blindingly obvious.

Stop doing so much!

How?

1. Identify the 10% of activities that deliver 90% of your benefits – in your teams, projects and organisation.
2. Stop doing everything else.
3. Ensure this passes through your whole organisation so people have time to 'be' as well as 'do'.

Simplicity – it's not an idea, it's a choice.

And never has making that choice mattered as much as it does right now.

David

"What seems to us as bitter trials are often blessings in disguise." -

Oscar Wilde

Do the work you were always meant to do

Steve Raw

My stiff shirt collar is chaffing against my neck as I rush to work (I'm late) and through the Victorian Shop Arcade that leads to our offices. Now I am at the end of the arcade, up a few steps, turn immediately right and, as I push through the door, I am greeted by my team. I am the Chief Clerk of a firm of solicitors. This is the field of work I was obviously never meant to enter, as this is part of a recurring dream I have had for many years.

Why a Chief Clerk in a firm of Solicitors? Arriving in Colchester, I still had 7 years to do in the Army (my first career) and I started to imagine that this would be the kind of work I would be doing when I retired from my army career. I thought this would be my future and I started looking into this line of work, but it was work I was not destined to do. I am sure it would have been a good job, but it was not going to get me out of bed each morning eager for work, and it certainly was not going to be another career. It was only in the last year of my military service that I made up my mind up to support people with learning disabilities.

I had fulfilled my boyhood dream of joining the Army and lived that dream for 24 years, could I have another career that would last the same amount of time and perhaps even longer? I needed to find out.

Life is short and as my wife, Joyce, often reminds me, you are a long time at work, so it is important that you are happy doing what you do. So before it is too late for you to do the work you were always meant to do, here is what to do (if you are not already doing it):

5 Questions to ask yourself

What is it that you are passionate about?

Do you want your work to make a difference?

What will it take to make you feel fulfilled?

What skills, experiences, knowledge, gifts and capabilities do you have?

Do you want a job or a career? Both are good but it is important for your expectations that you know so that what you decide is what you really want to do.

5 steps to take

Volunteer to do voluntary work in your chosen field. It will give you a taster, help you to make a firm decision, and show commitment to those you may work with in the future

Do your research about the work so you don't go in cold. This will help you to see what you are letting yourself in for and, again, shows commitment.

Talk to people who have done something similar to what you are considering – what are the highs and the lows – so there are no surprises.

Find out what training and qualifications you will need to help you reach your goal. By doing what you can now, it will save time in the future and also will look good on your CV.

Find the right organisations that meet your values and aspirations. The work might be what you are looking for, but the organisation might not be the right fit for you.

1 Take Away

For my older readers, it is never too late to do the work you were always meant to do. A few years ago I came across an article from one of my boyhood football heroes (David Craig) a full back for Newcastle Utd during the late 1960s and 1970s. David had been a businessman too and he had become involved in supporting people with learning disabilities in his sixties as a support worker. He described how fulfilling it was and wished he had done it earlier

Summary

I hope these tips cover any field you might consider your dream job, but if you are looking to do what I have loved doing for the last 20 years, send me a message and I will point you in the right direction, or, alternatively, you could have a look at my company's website www.dosh.org

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