

Pack. Repack. Repeat.

September 2, 2014

It was an ultimate adventure to a realm far away and deep within. Richard was leading a walking safari in Tanzania along the edge of the great Serengeti Plains. Looking like a walking advertisement for Patagonia, he was delighted when his new friend Thaddeus Ole Koyie, a Maasai village elder, expressed a fascination with seeing the contents of his impressive backpack. Proudly, he commenced to lay out all of his high tech essentials. After several minutes of just gazing at everything, Koyie asked with great intensity, “Does all this make you happy?”



With that simple question, Koyie captured the essence of the questions that weigh so heavily on many of us. What am I carrying? What will make me happy in the “next phase of the journey?” What is the good life to me?

Both the implications and the importance of the question were immediately apparent. In a split second, his question had gotten Richard to think about all he was carrying and why – not just on that trek, but through his entire life.

Pack.

What will make us happy in the next phase of our lives? As a coach and teacher, we often witness people who are pondering “what’s next?” Bringing our lives to a grinding halt to reflect on the journey is rarely practical, but there are ways to “pack our bags”* for the next phase of our lives. Personally, Richard admits that while some of his “stuff” did make him happy, quite a lot of it did not. The insights gleaned from Koyie’s question ultimately inspired us to write *Repacking Your Bags*.

Packing means asking the right questions, rather than offering the wrong answers. As simple and poignant as, “What is the good life?,” “Am I living in the place I love, with the people I love, doing the right work, on purpose” can present a new passport to adapting to the new realities of life and work, today. The book, which employs the luggage-and-travel metaphor to help readers reconsider their own paths and parcels, quickly turned into an international best seller, and was recently released in a revamped third edition.

Repack.

It takes courage to look at what we’re carrying – and even more to consider leaving some behind. It’s much easier to just live with what we have, secretly longing for a new map and a new itinerary. As

seasoned explorers of both wilderness and adult development, we often advise people to “pack, repack and repeat repacking” their bags and, perhaps, “lighten their load” for the good life.

When life feels out of control, it can be tempting to grasp at handy, prepackaged ideas that promise to lighten our loads. The trouble is, a lot of these so-called “simplification” strategies fail to address the underlying reasons our lives are so complicated in the first place.

Repacking is more than a simplification strategy; it addresses the core questions for happiness. It also helps us cope positively with both positive and negative “trigger events” that we will inevitably encounter, whatever our life stage or circumstances. We may be dashing around finding all sorts of solutions and answers, but are we asking ourselves the truly important questions?

What Matters?

Meaning matters. A study of “repacking” by the Met Life Mature Market Institute, researched the paths to finding “meaning” or a sense of “purpose” in life those age 25 to 74. As a follow-up to an earlier Discovering What Matters study, which looked at the 45 to 74 year old group only, this new study reports that “meaning,” particularly the importance of “travel partners”, is a primary component of living “the good life” for all age groups. Both studies report that most adults want financial freedom, good physical and mental health, deep relationships, a sense of purpose, and to feel that they belong, all synopsized as: “mattering matters.” Unfortunately, a lot of times it takes a crisis (mid-life or otherwise) to inspire people to do this sort of deeper repacking. The book, however, invites readers to reflect on their choices, and in the process reveal the life they most want to be living.

Preparing for the Long Haul

We originally wrote Repacking in response to what we realized was a growing and urgent desire – the desire shared by countless people, to simplify and solidify lives that seemed unbalanced, overloaded, and generally out of control. The original Repacking was intended as a guide to a specific process that we thought people might undertake once (or at most a couple of times) in their lives. Over time, though, we came to realize that repacking is an essential life skill, a continual and proactive process. There are many times to pack, repack, repeat. When we don’t repack, the results can be stressful. We must learn to repack for the new realities of a new era of volatility, uncertainty, complexity, and ambiguity.

What is the Good Life?

The good life is a choice to live in the place we belong, with the people we love, doing the right work, on purpose.

We need to regularly dust off our old assumptions about “the good life” and repack our bags by exploring new ways to lighten our loads. We must learn to pack, repack, repeat – and, to ask ourselves the question Koyie asked Richard: “Does all this make you happy?”

Packing and Pondering

Repacking offers a journal in the Appendix to help people pinpoint just exactly what the good life would

look and feel like for them, how far they are from living it, what they'll need in their bag for the journey, and how to determine the best route to get there.

Repacking Checklist:

The items on the Repacking Checklist summarize the essentials for a successful and good life journey. It is a guide for reflecting on what we currently have, what we need, and what we need to unpack or let go of. For each item, we can ask ourselves the question Koyie asked Richard: "Does all this make me happy?"

Checklist Items. Have it. Need it.

Passport

- Where am I going?
- Why am I going there?

Baggage

- What am I carrying?
- Why am I carrying it?

Map

- What's my vision for where I'll end up?
- What side trips will I take along the way?

Money

- Do I have the cash I need?
- Do I have credit cards just in case?

Address Book

- Who are my travel advisors?
- Who are my travel partners?

Itinerary

- What if I get lost?
- What if I don't get lost?

Adventuring Spirit

- What do I need to unpack and let go of?
- What do I need to repack and hold onto?