

# Following the Thread

September 2, 2014

This poem by William Stafford is a place to return if we feel challenged by the daily grind of life and work.

## The Way it is

There's a thread you follow. It goes among things that change. But it doesn't change. People wonder about what you are pursuing. You have to explain about the thread. But it is hard for others to see.

While you hold it you can't get lost. Tragedies happen; people get hurt or die; and you suffer and get old. Nothing you do can stop times unfolding. You don't ever let go of the thread.

Daily, we face choice points that require decisions about what we are pursuing. As an executive coach and workshop leader working in business, wellness and spiritual centers, I have been privileged to share in the stories of many people who were creating a meaningful life by following the thread of purpose.

What are the keys that enable us to hold on to our thread and to sustain our passion and purpose?

## The Purpose Moment

A purposeful life is made up of purpose moments. In 2007 the Princeton University economist Alan Krueger, Nobel laureate Daniel Kahneman, and their colleagues published an eye-opening paper called "Are We Having More Fun Yet?" As a result of 50 years of social and technological progress, a wide array of choices has opened up for how to use our time. But, in the background was a lingering question. Did these choices allow us to spend more time doing what we cared about most, thus increasing our purpose and meaning in life?

For too many of us, too frequently, the answer was a troublesome no. Most people spend less than 20% of the day engaged in purpose moments such as talking with close friends, spiritual practice and prayer, meaningful work, etc.

It doesn't have to be this way. Our lives don't have to be dominated by the daily grind. To do so, we must reclaim our lives in three ways:

1. Following our thread.
2. Recalling our gifts.
3. Measuring our lives.



## **Following Our Thread**

The first step toward our renewed life is to act consciously on the purpose moments. We each have wisdom about the fulfillment we ought to—want to—have in our lives. But to access that wisdom, we need to create for ourselves a daily contemplative practice. A practice that enables us to be mindful of the thread, right now, and throughout the year.

Our quiet mind—the locus of our inner wisdom, is one of our great gifts. Yet, to use it well requires a moment of solitude, daily, in which we quiet the outer distractions and the inner babble and listen to the deep voice within.

Through a “daily solo”—a walk, a respite in nature, three deep breaths—we can come to know our purpose thread. The thread we most desire and need, can be grabbed hold of if we first use the gift of a quiet mind to choose wisely. The solo helps to remind us of where we fit in the grand scheme of things. As author Anne Lamott reminds us, “Only one six-billionth of this is about you.”

Joseph Campbell captured the spirit of the daily solo: “You must have a room, or a certain hour or so a day, where you don’t know what was in the newspaper that morning, you don’t know what you owe anybody, you don’t know what anybody owes you. This is a place where you can simply experience and bring forth what you are and what you might be.”

## **Recalling Our Gifts**

Once we have a hold of the thread, we are then inspired to recall and express our gifts—our unique Calling Cards®. Our gifts refer to the strengths that our hands turn to most naturally. As we bring these gifts to life, we find we have not only a greater sense of self-regard, but we also have more productive energy with which to be creative and productive.

Recalling our gifts means more than just our literal talents and strengths. It also refers to claiming the power of our own lives.

It may seem a bit strange to think that one person, choosing to live from their gifts can become a force for good. Yet, this is how it has always been. One by one as we recall our gifts, we live truly purposeful, fulfilling lives.

## **Measuring Our Lives**

How will you, ultimately, measure your life?

As we mature into a more purposeful life, we become more energized and engaged. We become more curious about the lives of others. As this occurs, we naturally want to serve—to be “servant-leaders. We are more awake to the power of purpose and how we can positively impact others. We contribute more to the healing of the world and less to its wounds.

Following our thread benefits the larger world. As we hold on to it, we find the courage to journey down our chosen path.

The Oxford Dictionary defines success as: “the attainment of wealth, fame, or position.” The “purpose” model of success is defined by a whole different value system—it is measured by how well our personal life thread aligns with our work or organization’s mission and how well that aligns with our planet’s mission, which is the sustainability and continuation of all life.

This is an inside-out point of view. We measure our success, first by personal growth, then by contributing to the health and well-being of others and, ultimately, our planet.

Follow your thread, recall your gifts, and measure your life from the inside-out. It’s a new year. This very moment is your choice point.