

Living the Good Life

“Retirement”: Images of fishing on a placid lake, a leisurely stroll through the New York Times taking half the morning, a picnic with the grandkids on a Tuesday afternoon. Or maybe a full slate of activities ranging from board meetings to volunteering at the hospital and mentoring young entrepreneurs through SCORE (resource partner of the Small Business Administration).

I’m not sure exactly what my picture of retirement was but without any warning, there I was. In one short month, it has presented for my consideration:

- writing this essay
- managing a Bed & Breakfast for a week
- facilitating a weekend retreat for a non-profit company in Wichita
- joining a Tai Chi class
- traveling the country, and perhaps beyond, selling a package to golf courses
- consulting back into the telecommunications industry I just retired from
- climbing the highest peak in Arizona
- offering emotional support to a friend in deep distress
- writing a book
- and more

What I have discovered is that I am not actually in “retirement”. I am in “reirement”.

As in any other hiring process, I have found that I need to consider these things before deciding on accepting the job:

1. What is the new job description?
2. To whom do I report?
3. What is my reward or compensation?

My new job description doesn’t have the clear cut parameters of the corporate world. When I eliminate the manmade policies that directed my actions in that environment, there is yet an internal knowing of what is appropriate and fitting for me to do. So when my reirement brings me choices such as those listed above, my new job description is to “tune in” to that internal knowing and choose from a list of “good” things those activities which seem “right” for me to do. I think of this as following the dictates of Spirit, becoming aware of the inherent design of Life (with a capital “L”) and coming into alignment with that. Two things have become clear: 1. those things which are “right” for me, bring joy and 2. it is easier to tune into Life’s design when I don’t fill up the calendar ahead of time! There have been times in my life when I was aware of my inner knowing and even those fortunate times when I paid attention and followed through, even though it meant doing something I couldn’t explain or that was outside my comfort zone. But an ease and clarity comes when my mind hasn’t already decided what I’m going to do this afternoon or next week or next year.

Sure, I have plans. Forty years in the business world is a hard habit to break. So, I have already submitted my application to the Peace Corps with intention of serving two years in South Africa. But I'm not invested in the outcome of what I have put in motion. Maybe I will go into the Peace Corps and go to South Africa. Maybe I won't. It's not about what I **PLAN** to do. It's **ALL** about following the clues (mostly internal) that Life brings me, whether it's the right place for me to be, the right thing for me to do, or the right people for me to be with. I sent in my Peace Corps application because that felt right to me at the time. But I recognize that I may have set that in motion because that is what is required to bring me into contact with someone with whom I may have something important to do. And I know that is just one of many possibilities. The wonderful thing is that I don't have to know at this point what the outcome will be. All I have to do is continue to follow the signposts that I know will be there at each crossroads. What an exciting and joyful way to live!

Truth be known, it doesn't take retirement to get to that place. Any time I have been connected to the true design of Life my experience has unfolded in the easiest, most magical way. Ease, grace, and wisdom flowed naturally every time I released my need to control the external facts of my situation and simply let myself be a conduit for the right words and actions as they came through me. This was true even when – no, make that *especially* when - I was at my busiest. I have had times in my life when it seemed like it was just TOO MUCH and I was feeling paralyzed, unable to act on anything. I found that if I simply took a 5-10 minute nap or a walk in the sun or any other way of disengaging my conscious mind from *trying* to solve problems, life suddenly became easily manageable. The next step was evident, and everything got done.

It has been my experience that the most effective people operate in that space. They do all of the required “due diligence” attached to whatever project they are considering and then they open themselves up to what *feels* right. Sometimes we call it a hunch, intuition, gut feeling, a vision, or an inner knowing. Sometimes it is right in line with the direction given by our mental process and sometimes it is the exact opposite. Sometimes it is in agreement with the advice we are getting from those close to us and sometimes it is 180 degrees in the other direction.

For me, I have learned to trust this “knowing”. I would love to say that I have always followed it but, as the old adage says, “Good judgment comes from experience and experience comes from bad judgment”! Unfortunately, I learned to trust my deep intuition only by ignoring it several times in favor of logic, reason, “good” advice, and careful research. Most often, what seemed like the right path based on “due diligence” turned out to be a dead end, detour, or rocky road.

So I pondered eliminating the entire mental process. No more planning, evaluating, considering, researching, and brainstorming with others whether working on a project or contemplating a change in job, relationship, or other life situation. After all, if it's going to come down to getting in touch with my deep knowing of Life's design, why bother going through all of the mental gymnastics?

Some people may well be able to access that place easily for all of their decisions. For me, decisions fall into 3 categories:

1. Sometimes there is *no need* for the mental process. At one point in my life, I embarked on a journey from New Jersey to the Santa Clara Valley. My intent was to take 2-3 years to get there while living 2-6 months in a number of different cities along the way just to get to know the texture of various parts of this country. In each city, I woke up one day **knowing** that the time there was complete and it was time to move on. Interestingly, I have been “passing through” Phoenix for 30 years now waiting for that day to come! And the only part of this trip that I had solid plans for was my next stop, which was to be Las Vegas. Instead of doggedly adhering to that plan or going through a mental process to determine the “best” next step, I went with my inner knowing - that connection to Life’s design - to guide me.
2. Sometimes the mental process *precedes* the decision, and it may be necessary even though it does not drive the ultimate decision. This happens for me when I am not yet clear on the direction to take. What is required is for me to build substance in the area that builds connection and ultimately brings clarity. To do this, I have to enter into the process of research, analysis, dialogue, etc without being attached to that process as the tool to make the decision. I find that if I fully engage in this process, and then come to a place of rest and release, the answer is there for me. My decision to retire from the telecommunications industry without yet knowing what might be next for me falls into this category. It started with a **sensing** that my time in this industry was over but the **knowing** didn’t come for me until I had considered some alternatives, done the math to see how I would live without an income, and discussed the situation with several people close to me. Those actions, in themselves, did not make my decision. But by the time that process was complete, the sensing I had felt to begin with had grown so strong that I could no longer deny it.
3. Sometimes, the mental process *follows* the decision made by intuition. When done **unconsciously**, this process is known as rationalization! We know what we are going to do, so now we pick and choose (or sometimes make up) the facts and figures that support that decision. When done **consciously**, this is simply appropriate planning to take care of the logistics necessary to bring about embarkation on the path we know is right. In my case, the Peace Corps decision fits into this category. Applying to the Peace Corps was a decision brought about by knowing at a deep level that this was right for me. Once I made that decision, I began to research how to go about it. I checked it out through literature and the experience of others as to what it entailed. Doing that type of research is partly required to handle the logistics as

mentioned above. It is also needed to develop greater awareness, knowledge, and expertise of the subject. In so doing, I create a more substantial connection so that the eventual transition is smoother. I call this “building substance” in an area.

This post-decision work can be driven either by the desire of the mind to take control again or the continuation of the spirit that initiated the decision. I find that I have to stay alert to differentiate between these two. If the mind takes control, I become goal-oriented (join the Peace Corps) rather than continuing to pay attention to the process (interacting with people) which could change the goal.

Listening deeply and discerning appropriate actions is the first step. Acting on them is the second. That is not always as easy as it sounds. Sometimes, the direction revealed to me might not be the most comfortable and, after all, isn't retirement supposed to be my time to kick back and take it easy – enjoy the fruits of my labor? Hmmmm – NO, apparently not! When it first became clear to me that I was to put in my application to the Peace Corps, my mind, emotions, and body rebelled in unison! I have never been a camper, hunter, fisherman, mountain climber, spelunker, or deep sea diver. In other words, other than enjoying day hikes, I'm not a wilderness type. I like my comfort too much. High on my list of undesirable conditions are flies, mosquitoes, humidity, sleeping on anything other than a nice comfortable bed with a fluffy pillow or two, a bathroom appliance constructed of anything other than porcelain, any creature with no legs or more than four, food that has been killed within the past 24 hours, and a lack of chocolate. In addition, I have never been comfortable being in a country where I don't understand the language, money, customs, and food options. Does this sound like your typical Peace Corps volunteer??? I think not. So why in the world would I settle on the Peace Corps as the most attractive option for my 60th and 61st years? Trust me, I wouldn't. At least my physical, mental, and emotional elements wouldn't.

This direction came from a deeper level - true identity – the real Boss. While those physical, mental, and emotional components were napping, my very soul touched into the current of Life and it was crystal clear that I needed to initiate this process. Interestingly, the clarity was such that I didn't even feel resistance on the physical, emotional, and mental levels. When I wrote above that these capacities of mine “rebelled in unison!” it was more to turn a clever phrase and to make the point that this would NOT be a choice that I would have made at those levels. But the fact is, I did NOT feel rebellion or resistance of any kind. When we come to a realization of what is right for us, our entire Being comes into alignment with that decision. Where it can begin to unravel is when we insist on dissecting the decision at a mental, physical, or emotional level. The classic example is the mother that lifts a car up so her child can be saved from underneath it. The person who stops to think through this possibility, consider the possible damage to her back, ponder other alternatives, and so on will NOT lift the car.

So – back to the state of “reirement” and what it means to me. To whom do I report? ME! Just me. But for this new job to run smoothly I have to be clear about the identity of this boss, the one I think of as ME. Sometimes I get confused and think that “me” means the mental ideas floating around in my head or the emotional state permeating my body. When I accept that “me” as boss, I lose sight of the original job description, which is following the lead of Spirit. I forget that the physical, mental, and emotional tools that I have been blessed with are resources to help me get the job done but are not intended to be “the boss”. The power of Life that I accept as my boss is, in reality, the true ME and when I realize that my identity is truly in that, then it is easy to clearly hear the orders that are coming down as to what the job is for today – one moment at a time.

I have always loved the story of Moses and the Red Sea as a great example of following this intuitive knowing even if it seems to fly in the face of logic. The grumbling of the Children of Israel when they realized they were trapped between the Egyptian army and the Red Sea is symbolic of the flack we get when we move in a direction that we may not be able to support with logic and reason. This flack may come from our relatives, friends, and other well-meaning advisors or it may be felt as internal mental and emotional questioning. But if we KNOW that it is the right direction for us, then we move on it in confidence. There is no indication that Moses knew what he was going to do when he reached the Red Sea. He simply knew that they needed to take that route. Only when they arrived, was it clear to him what to do next and the path to salvation appeared.

Similarly, when I left NJ 30 years ago, I did not know that I was moving to Phoenix. I simply knew that I was to embark on this journey *thinking* that I was going to California. Today, I *know* that I needed to start the process to apply to the Peace Corps and I *think* my destination is South Africa but only as the journey unwinds will I discover what the true destination is.

The other factor that enters in as resistance is the thought that I am not equipped to do the job. That feeling of inadequacy is quite natural anytime we undertake anything with which we have no experience – particularly if it requires skills unknown to us. Moses again serves as an excellent example. When it was clear to him that it was his job to lead the Children of Israel out of Egypt (whether this was brought to him by the literal voice of God out of a burning bush or as a deep inner knowing burning inside his own consciousness), his immediate reaction was, “I am not eloquent...but I am slow of speech, and of a slow tongue”. He felt he did not possess the skill for the task set before him. Well – who does? None of us is skilled at anything when we first set out to do it. It has been said that anything worth doing is worth doing badly because *that’s* how you’re going to do it until you get good at it! In fact, you may never hone that skill to a high degree, yet still know joy through your actions. My mother was a wonderful example of this for me. She was constantly drawn to try new things and she turned out some pretty bad paintings, pottery, sweaters, and arts and crafts of all manners. But the value in all of those things was the joy of participating in creativity.

This is the true compensation offered to me in “reirement” and, in fact, to all of us in any endeavor undertaken at the direction of Spirit – the absolute joy of creation. So I would encourage anyone reading this to consider whatever you are doing – whether during a career or into “reirement” – as to whether you are doing something that brings you joy and rings true in your heart. If so, then welcome to the good life!

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