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"Somebody showed it to me, and I found it by myself"
- Lew Welch

Loving the Recession



Disaster is always laced with opportunities. Find them, focus on them, build on them, and your life and work can soar in ways that just might make you thank the downturn.

The recession is hammering my business, and I'm excited about it.

No, wait. Don't exit just yet. I'm not Pollyanna. I'm not here to say, "Don't worry; be happy."

If you've been hit hard by the recession, this is about you. This is about **creating, from your life, a work of art**. Because if you're not doing that, what *are* you doing with your life?

Look -- when business, or life, is humming merrily along, we never get the chance (or more accurately *take* the chance) to stop and reassess. What's working? What isn't? How's that "work of art" coming along, anyway? If I knew I were going to die one year from today, would I continue to live the way I'm living now?

There's an old Zen parable that goes something like this: The monk approaches the master to ask, "What's the secret to a happy, fulfilled life?" The master replies: "An appropriate response."

In any given moment, in any given economic catastrophe, in any given lifetime, you choose your response. Now, I haven't totally drunk the Kool-Aid of "The Secret" (aka the Law of Attraction) -- i.e. "you can get anything you want as long as you want it hard enough." Tell that to a ballerina who wants a career in the NFL. External factors do have an impact on the realization of our dreams.

But few of us realize how much potential we *do* have to -- as Thoreau said -- "elevate our lives by conscious endeavor." Fewer still *live* that awareness.

Right there is the gold mine in the economic meltdown.

Creating That Work of Art

I had my best year ever in 2008, building on my best year ever before that, in 2007. And now, here in 2009, the bottom has dropped out.

As a personal/executive coach, I keep telling myself, "If my 'response' to this challenge doesn't rise to what I'd advise my clients -- if it doesn't focus on possibility and opportunity -- maybe I oughtta get out of this biz. Ya know, 'Physician, heal thyself?'"

So I set to work. And I hope my process can inspire you to help yourself, or someone you love, to move powerfully forward in this crazy time.

I started by noticing that suddenly I have more discretionary time (duh!) than I've had in a long time. Emphasis on "discretionary" -- as in, I get to choose. In other words, more freedom, more opportunity.

Sure, there's an underlying context of fear and anxiety. I'm not pretending it's not there. But I also don't have to be a slave to it. Again, I get to choose. What's the point of dwelling on fear and anxiety, if I can choose to dwell elsewhere?

The 4 Questions

So then I asked myself four questions that I know (as a trained professional coach -- don't try this at home) are critical to moving your life forward with integrity and power.

While I was busy with all those great clients, I didn't have the time to ask myself these four critical questions. But they're important -- they allow me to spend time mapping out the future that's calling to me, rather than spending time just reacting to the next deadline.

First, **What are my core values?** In other words, what does my life stand for? There's any number of exercises you can do to answer that question. One simple one: the nonprofit Center for Ethical Leadership's [Core Values Exercise](#). It's free.

Your values are your fuel; they propel you. But *toward what?* As somebody once said, "If you don't know where you're going, any road will get you there." You need a destination.

That's what *vision* is for. Your vision is your North Star. Doesn't matter if you ever get there. As long as you're heading diligently in that direction, your life has meaning.

Hence, the second question: **"What's my vision for myself (or my business)?"** Make it concrete. Be able to see it, feel it, hear it. The answer wants to be ambitious enough to require some courage and some diligence to get there, but not so ambitious that it feels hopelessly out of reach. This process is pure creativity -- you're the artist; your life is the medium.

Play with different possible visions. Find one that rings in your heart and energizes your mind. One that will pull you toward it joyfully. One that makes all of you say, "Yes, that's it. That's me. That's what I'm here to do. If I work toward *that*, when I die I'll die happy."

Here's a piece of my vision, in case you're interested: I want to bring folks who care about healing the planet together in small groups to support and challenge each other to take a more active role. I'm creating vehicles to do that -- and, boy, is that creation fulfilling.

Make sure you involve some trusted friends, partners, loved ones in the crafting of your vision. Then, with your North Star firmly in place ...

Get It In Gear

Break it down into actionable steps. So, Question 3, a two--parter: **(a) What are the steps to achieving my vision, and (b) which of them do I have time and energy for now?**

What are those projects, processes, creative ideas -- on the road to pursuing my vision -- that'll make my business sing? The ones I never could get to when I was always busy? Maybe they've been on the back burner for months or even years. Cool! I've got time for them now! Hmm ... might have to work on the ones that don't involve a lot of capital, but, okay, those are the parameters I'm working within now; might as well accept them.

Notice the difference between that tone and this one: "Jeez, what do I have to do to get money coming in? How the hell am I gonna keep the creditors away? What if I die penniless and alone?"

Those are two ways to respond to challenge. Only one of them is "an appropriate response." And here's the secret: the appropriate one is pretty much guaranteed to be the more effective one, long--term. Confidence, hope, curiosity, and showing up with enthusiasm and a sense of possibility -- these qualities (as long as they're authentic) win clients and contracts. Pessimism, cynicism and despair -- not so much.

And once you've decided what projects to work on in support of your vision, schedule them. But first you'll need to ask Question 4: **What and whom do I need to support me in pursuing my vision?**

Don't try to do it alone. Rugged individualism is hoey. The days of the Lone Ranger are over. In a fabulous little book called *The Life We Are Given*, the authors note simply: "People cannot make healthy and lasting changes without solid social support."

So bring trusted others in. Ask them for their support in holding you accountable for following through on your intentions. Share with them your insights and feelings as you walk this new path, and ask them for non--judgmental feedback.

A Final Word

I can't guarantee if you work through this four-question process, you'll get rich quick or "beat the recession." **I can guarantee you'll survive the recession with your integrity intact and with**

your head held high. I can guarantee your life will be richer than if you had taken the path of despair.

Which brings up a serious note: I don't mean to trivialize the pain that's rampant in our time. Many are grieving, and grief needs to be processed in open-hearted and appropriate ways. I know that some of my ideas here are easier said than done. And they *can* be done. One step, one focused thought at a time.

In these, well ... *interesting* times, when it seems all the old rules are changing, may you find new rules that help you evolve. And in the words of the lovingkindness meditation, may you be peaceful, so you can spread peace. And may you learn the lessons you need to learn as easily as possible.

Steve Motenko, PCC, is a Harvard-educated leadership trainer and a certified personal development coach. He's facilitated management training experiences at Boeing, Microsoft, and in government agencies, nonprofits, community organizations, and educational institutions across the country. In his coaching practice, he supports leaders committed to living into their highest aspirations.

Steve is offering a "Loving the Recession" workshop in Seattle on April 29, 2009 (www.stevemotenko.com/LovingTheRecession-workshop.html), applying insights and practices from this article.

And if you're interested in coaching yourself -- or someone else -- to success, check out Steve's eight-week self-paced e-course: Coaching to Success: The 7 Layers. (<http://www.stevemotenko.com/e-course.html>).

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