

GUEST SPEAKER

Understanding your personal mission

Being happy with yourself and your work is more important than following the so-called 'right path.'

I sat across the table from my coaching client, "Tim," in a crowded coffee shop and listened to his story. He is 48 years old and wants to discover what he really enjoys doing. He proclaimed, "I feel trapped in a job that I don't really enjoy anymore. I want to find something that is reliably exciting."

Tim's account is not unique. I have heard this story before from many senior leaders in the A/E industry. Unsure of what to do next, they speak of this disorienting dilemma as they struggle to understand their purpose in life. And with the economy continuing to struggle, many are reevaluating their careers in an effort to bring more meaning into their lives. We all want to be able to whistle while we work.

Understanding your purpose or personal mission is a precursor to developing a fulfilling career and life. Yet we struggle with this issue, sometimes for years. And then we discover our purpose in life often changes over time. So, how do we move beyond the fog we often find ourselves in, especially mid-career?

Mission development is typically seen as a learning event. I have participated in several workshops throughout my career that teach how to develop your mission, and I have a dozen books that discuss the same topic. However, understanding your mission is much more about a process of unlearning commonly held beliefs about what a mission is made up of.

We struggle initially with the notion that our mission has to be original and unique to us. Richard Nelson Bolles, the author of the popular book *What*



Leigh
Mires

Color is Your Parachute, says, "We need to unlearn the idea that everything about our mission must be unique to us, and learn instead that some parts of our mission here on Earth are shared by all human beings."

What are the things we share with others? Regardless of religious beliefs, most of us believe that we were sent here to bring more kindness, gratitude, forgiveness, love, and helpfulness into the world—and the world of business.

Secondly, we have to unlearn the idea that our unique mission must consist of some achievement for the entire world to see. Bolles says, "It may be that we helped bring about profound change for the better in the lives of others around us, but it also may be that this takes place beyond our sight, or after we have gone on."

We live in a world seeking immediate gratification, so we must understand and embrace that we may never know the impact we had on an individual or an organization. Our mission is to make choices in important decision moments and take actions that bring more kindness, gratitude, forgiveness, love, and helpfulness into the world, even if it is not realized until long after we have left the scene.

Lastly, you do not need Nobel Prize-level achievements to provide insights into your passion and purpose in life. You need not look any farther than your daily experiences from your life and work. Those daily experiences are packed with rich evidence about what you enjoy doing and what you believe you do well.

However, to benefit from this information, you must take the time to reflect on your experiences and think carefully about the nature of your satisfaction. What are the recurring themes that appear in your achievements and experiences over time? What is your energy level like when you recount a story of a fun work experience? It is, quite simply, a matter of looking.

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ON THE MOVE

BAXLEY JOINS LEO A DALY: William Baxley recently joined LEO A DALY (Omaha, NE), a 1,000-person international architecture, planning, engineering, interior design and program management firm, as vice president and director of design for the firm's Minneapolis office.

Baxley has designed a wide range of projects throughout the country, including government, library, religious, mixed-use, corporate, educational, recreational and residential projects. Before joining LEO A DALY, Baxley was a partner at the BKV Group (Minneapolis, MN) for 12 years.

HALCROW ADDS DIRECTOR: Halcrow (New York, NY), a 7,000-person planning, design and management services firm, is pleased to announce the addition of Robert Fetter as director of navy programs for Halcrow in North America.

In this newly created position, Fetter will be responsible for building upon Halcrow's relationship with the U.S. Navy and its engineering operations.

Fetter is a retired Civil Engineer Corps captain who brings more than 25 years of Navy facilities management and capital improvement experience to Halcrow. He has extensive federal acquisition experience with a proven track record of team building.

Does all this sound a little like motherhood and apple pie? Maybe. But I have sat around too many tables full of mid-career professionals asking the question, "Is this all there is to this job, career, industry?"

Work without meaning can be deadly.

The long-term impact of job dissatisfaction can take a toll on your health, your family, even your self-esteem. Invest in a little unlearning and reflect on your experiences to understand your personal mission. Clarity from the fog will not come without a little effort on your part, but it will come, and then you will be able to truly whistle while you work. ■■

LEIGH A. MIRES is a principal and director of organizational development and training at Walter P Moore (Houston, TX). She can be reached at LMires@walterpmoore.com.