

# ON **PURPOSE**

## I WONDER WHERE THE ROAD LESS TRAVELED WOULD'VE TAKEN ME?

by Richard J. Leider

Beginning January 1, 1996, and continuing every eight seconds for the next 18 years, someone in the U.S. will turn 50.

Many of these people will experience the inner turmoil associated with raising questions about the purpose of their work and their personal life and with identifying meaningful choices for the future.

Are you at a stage of life when you would like to explore new work/life roads? Maybe you are asking yourself questions like these:

*I just don't feel like getting up in the morning; how can I discover new sources of energy?*

*I no longer look young; why does it bother me so much?*

*Another side of my personality is emerging; who is this "other person" inside me?*

*I want more intimacy; where and with whom can I create it?*

*I brushed aside certain talents I had; how can I do what I love and still make a living?*

Many people, at varying points in their lives, wonder where the road less traveled would've taken them. They're sure there are other roads but they're not sure how to think about them. A new kind of dialogue, a "trip checklist," is often needed to help people decide what roads to travel in the *next* phase of their lives.

### UNPACKING: THE THREE BAGS OF LIFE

If you imagine your life as a journey on the road, then you can think of its various components in terms of the various bags you are carrying. Everyone carries three different bags. These are:

- A Briefcase—your **work** baggage
- An Overnight Bag—your **love** baggage
- A Trunk—your **place** baggage

To discover the roads to travel in the future, it's helpful to unpack your bags and examine what you're currently carrying. A good way to do this is in a dialogue with others.

As you go through the Three Bags of Life, what you're doing is creating a Trip Checklist. You've seen these at camping or luggage stores, or maybe you're the kind of person who creates them on your own. It's simply a way to make sure that you're bringing all you need with you on your journey, while at the same time, not bringing too much.

You're taking stock of where you are and how you've gotten there. You're examining the roads you've traveled in your life and trying to determine if the directions still serve you. You're seeing if you still have the answers. Or if even the questions have changed.

The Trip Checklist isn't a test. Think of it more as a *life audit*. There are no right or wrong answers. The point is to simply answer as truthfully as possible

and learn as much about yourself as you possibly can.

## **CREATING A REPACKING TRAVEL GROUP**

A creative way to take a look at the work/life roads ahead is to create a Repacking Travel Group. The purpose of the group is to assist you and a handful of fellow travelers with unpacking and repacking your bags.

Repacking groups come in different sizes, ages, gender and colors. What they have in common is that they are a place where people can fully unpack their innermost thoughts and feelings to discover or re-discover their own visions of the good life.

To start one, ask some people to join you. Try to enlist people with one or more of the following qualifications: you feel comfortable talking openly with them; they will take initiative in meeting with you on a regular basis; they are wiser than you are; and they will read *Repacking Your Bags: Lighten Your Load for the Rest of Your Life* (Leider & Shapiro, Berrett-Koehler Publishers, 1995) and do selected exercises before each meeting.

The Repacking group is patterned after a group that Benjamin Franklin established in 1727. His group, called the Junto, met every Friday night in a room over a tavern in Philadelphia. Franklin claimed the club was "the best School of Philosophy, Morals and Politics that then existed in the Province..."

Every meeting opened with a set of "queries" (both pious and practical) "with a pause between each while one might fill and drink a glass of wine." The Junto endured 30 years; Franklin even thought of making it international.

## **FACILITATING A REPACKING TRAVEL GROUP**

Repacking meetings can be held around breakfast, lunch, after work or anytime that people can

commit to six sessions in a row. An informal leader will need to emerge to keep the momentum and focus going. Some format suggestions include the following:

- Meet once a week for six weeks.
- Meet at the same time each week for a designated time (two hours).
- Alternate responsibility for arranging and leading each session.
- Have a specific assignment each week.
- Follow this general six-week flow:

### **WEEK ONE: DOES ALL THIS MAKE YOU HAPPY?**

#### *Read*

Prologue, pp. 1-8  
Section I, pp. 9-36

#### *Do*

Postcard Exercises, p. 23 and p. 37

#### *Dialogue*

Decide on group logistics/expectations  
Group introductions  
Review Postcard Exercises

### **WEEK TWO: WHAT DO YOU DO?— UNPACKING YOUR BRIEFCASE**

#### *Read*

Section III Work Bags, pp. 74-106

#### *Do*

Postcard Exercises, p. 91 and p. 107

#### *Dialogue*

Reflect aloud on these questions:

Do you have hidden talents? What are they? How are you expressing those talents?

## The Trip Checklist: 12 Essentials for Unpacking

<u>Checklist Item</u>	<u>Have It</u>	<u>Need It</u>
<b>Passport</b> <i>Sense of Purpose—a reason for the trip</i>		
<b>Adventuring Spirit</b> <i>Willingness to let my spirit roam, to plan my own itinerary</i>		
<b>Map</b> <i>Sense of direction to my journey</i>		
<b>Tickets</b> <i>Talents or credentials to explore new places and opportunities</i>		
<b>Traveler's Checks</b> <i>Enough money to enjoy the trip</i>		
<b>Travel Partners</b> <i>People to share the experience with</i>		
<b>Travel Guides</b> <i>Key sources for advice along the way</i>		
<b>Luggage</b> <i>Appropriate style and size of bags for the trip I am on</i>		
<b>Carry-on Bag</b> <i>Stuff I need at hand to make the trip enjoyable—books, learning tools and a sense of humor</i>		
<b>Toilet Kit</b> <i>Energy and vitality to enjoy the trip</i>		
<b>Travel Journal</b> <i>Travel tips and key “lessons learned” from past trips</i>		
<b>Address Book</b> <i>Contact with important people in my life</i>		

What do you think "needs doing" in today's world?  
How does your work allow you to make a contribution to that?

Picture your typical workday. What is it filled with?  
How much of "you" goes through the door and how much of "you" do you check at the entrance? What do you picture your ideal workday to look like?

Does your work make you happy?

Review Postcard Exercises

### **WEEK THREE: WHOM DO YOU LOVE?— UNPACKING YOUR OVERNIGHT BAG**

*Read*

Section IV Relationship Bags, pp. 110-133

*Do*

Postcard Exercises, p. 123 and p. 134

*Dialogue*

Reflect aloud on these questions:

What life dreams do you share with the people closest to you?

Describe a typical day spent with those you love best. What's the best part of the day?

Do you spend as much time as you like with your loved ones? How could you spend more?

Does your relationship life make you happy?

Review Postcard Exercises

### **WEEK FOUR: IS THERE NO PLACE LIKE HOME?—UNPACKING YOUR TRUNK**

*Read*

Section V Finding Your Place, pp. 136-155

*Do*

Postcard Exercises on p. 146 and p. 156

*Dialogue*

Reflect aloud on these questions:

What are the qualities that make "home" home to you?

What is your "most prized possession?" If your house were burning down, what would you grab?

If you could live anywhere, where would it be?  
Why aren't you living there now?

Does your home and living environment make you happy?

Review Postcard Exercises

### **WEEK FIVE: REPACKING YOUR BAGS— THE TRIP CHECKLIST**

*Read*

Section VI Repacking Your Bags, pp. 158-185

*Do*

The Trip Checklist II: 12 Essentials for Repacking, p. 171  
Postcard Exercises on p. 173 and p. 186

*Dialogue*

Complete the Trip Checklist and ask yourself:  
"What direction am I really headed in anyway?"  
Reflect aloud on these questions:

What are your hopes and dreams for the next leg of your journey?

What type of bag (backpack, attaché case, duffel bag, etc.) best illustrates where you're going next?

### **WEEK SIX: WHAT IF I DON'T GET LOST?**

*Read*

Section VII The Freedom of the Road, pp. 188-222

*Do*

Postcard Exercise on p. 204

*Dialogue*

Each member summarizes "Where will the next roads lead me?"

*Group celebration of the Good Life*

## **DECIDING WHERE TO TRAVEL DURING THE REST OF YOUR LIFE**

We learn from Carl Jung that the turmoil many people feel at mid-life is the soul suffering of those who have tried to "content themselves with inadequate or wrong answers to the questions of life." And he reminds us that each person's journey is different and that we never get to the point where we know finally and for sure what the journey has been about.

In *Quiet Desperation: The Truth About Successful Men*, Jan Holper describes what she found after interviewing more than 4,000 executives, managers and professionals. More than 58 percent of middle managers and professionals interviewed felt that they had wasted their lives in striving for, and even achieving, goals that were basically "empty and meaningless."

After a while it is hard for anyone to sustain passion for a road that one has been traveling for years. So much of the aliveness in anything has to do with a sense of discovery—the joy of growing in response to some new road or a new way to travel an old one. When discovery goes, it seems as if aliveness goes too. And even if no one else notices the deadness in your soul, you notice.

While re-reading James Thurber's *The Secret Life of Walter Mitty*, I was struck less by the craziness of Mitty's daydreams than by the fact that after each daydream down the road untraveled he goes back onto his daily road, but it's as if his old life has gotten a shot of aliveness from his traveling.

You, too, might be bored with what you do. You might feel that you have reached either a pinnacle or a plateau, and so you are ready to dream again. You might see in other careers a chance to test your talents, or the realization of earlier dreams. You might have no particular reason at all—save the

inexpressible desire to travel from here to there, to climb a mountain because it is there. Discovery is an essential part of life.

At every moment, in every situation, we are free to explore the freedom of the road. We always have the potential to dream—to unpack, decide what to carry and repack.

For many of us it takes a crisis, mid-life or other, to get us even thinking about what we're carrying. And then, unfortunately, we tend to make quick decisions from within the crisis.

We can use travel guides, like the Repacking Travel Group, to review our "trip checklist" out side of a crisis. We can reflect on our lives in a manner that helps us sort out what's really important—what makes us happy—from what's just weighing us down.

The age-old call to discover a new road ahead, one that will get us where we really want to go, is the same as to Tennyson's Ulysses:

*The long day wanes; the slow moon climbs; the deep moans around with many voices. Come, my friends, 'tis not too late to seek a newer world.*

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## **Can Five Billion of Us Have All the Things We Want? By Rick Jackson**

### **THE VIEW FROM SPACE**

When astronauts photographed Earth from space almost 30 years ago, it was the first time humanity saw the planet whole. We saw the land and water we share without political boundaries. And we saw

that our world has natural limits that cannot be escaped.

The view from space allowed us to see "the forest." However, it did not help us see "the trees"—the more than five billion people buying, trading and wanting things. The view from space did not show the crowded cities and threatened life forms all over the surface of the globe.

## THE VIEW FROM EARTH

In the stunning book, *Material World: A Global Family Portrait* (Peter Menzel, Sierra Club Books, San Francisco, 1994), we now have access to a new, close-up view of human lifestyles. Like nothing before, it displays the look and feel of the human condition everywhere on earth.

For *Material World*, 16 of the world's best photographers traveled to 30 nations around the globe. They lived for a week with families that are statistically average for that nation. At the end of their visit, photographers assembled each family outside of its home, surrounded by all of their possessions—a few jars and jugs for some, an explosion of electronic gadgetry for others.

In words and pictures, we are asked the question many have been avoiding: *Can five billion of us have all the things we want?*

Lifestyle and consumption disparities are no longer out of sight. We cannot claim ignorance about the vast gaps between people.

## FISCAL FITNESS

It is fitting for North Americans to reflect about lifestyles and consumption. Measured by our level of consumption, we are wildly successful.

Yet amidst this affluence is evidence of a different story. Our rising consumption—*today people in the U.S. own twice as many cars as in 1950*—frequently fails to translate into a higher quality of life—*American parents now spend 40 percent less time with their children than they did in 1965*. In

many ways, our wealth has come with unforeseen costs: personal, social and environmental. Unlimited consumption, once the hallmark of the American Dream, is becoming a nightmare.

The good news is that there is a positive trend toward "fiscal fitness." Tired of debt, stress and clutter, increasingly people want more time for families, friends, fun and community service. Many are discovering that the good life does not depend exclusively on more material good. Simplicity—needing less—may be a critical path to personal freedom and renewal.

However, North Americans have a long way to go to match the two-thirds of the world's population for whom simplicity is not choice, but fate. Frugality is an essential response if we are to demonstrate respect for those with whom we share the earth today, and respect for those from whom we borrow the earth—our children.

## BETTING THE PLANET

In "Betting the Planet," an essay that opens *Material World*, Charles Mann suggests that the human race has, in effect, entered into a great wager. The bet has at least three aspects. "Most immediate," says Mann, "is the stream of corporate capitalism that now washes over the globe, inundating everyone from Mali to Malibu in boomboxes, baseball caps, and Hollywood movies. Markets in Tunisia carry radios made in Mexico by corporations based in Singapore."

But life loses meaning as human consumption patterns look more and more alike. The industrial economies have replicated massive amounts of material goods. However, they have not answered the human cry for cultural identity.

A second aspect of the bet has to do with the family. Economic changes, oftentimes liberating, also fragment domestic life. Men leave farmsteads in search of paying work. Women pursue options they have never had before.

But what if nobody minds the children? In societies the world over, more children are finding fewer adults to spend time with them.

The third part of the wager concerns the non-human environment. Says Mann, "Three decades ago, when the first picture of earth appeared, they were accompanied by dire predictions that population pressure would...[explode]; that the world's raw materials would soon be used up; that starvation would overwhelm the globe in less than twenty years."

None of these terrible things have happened...yet.

*But the bets are still out.* While industry turns out more and more products, the distribution gap between rich and poor is growing still wider. While families in societies the world over race to accommodate change, more children are neglected. And, while nations of the world did gather in Rio for the Earth Summit, nothing can bring back extinct species, or restore huge tracts of soil destroyed by overfertilization.

Mann concludes his essay by observing, "Everywhere the earth is habitable, it is inhabited." The frontier is gone forever.

Satisfying the needs, to say little about wants, of five billion people will require enormous wisdom if we are to keep people feeling whole and be graceful stewards of our finite natural environment.

## **REDEFINING SUCCESS**

What is required of us to change unwise consumption patterns is no less than a fundamental redefinition of success. This challenge will require the best of humanity in spirit, mind and body.

What does it mean to "redefine success?" One of the dominant assumptions of industrial society has been that growth is good. Bigger is better. More beats less. And most often, "bigger" and "more" are defined from two viewpoints. One is material: is my slice of the pie bigger; do I get more as a result of a particular transaction or relationship?

The other viewpoint, more subtle, is human. We have chosen to see the world from an exclusively human perspective. We have taken for granted the larger context of creation, which supports and allows *any* life to exist.

Since material and human-centered views have defined growth as the measure of our progress, we now find ourselves in a real bind. At the turn of the 21st century, many thoughtful people are realizing that we simply cannot keep going like this.

"More" of this kind of wealth and progress is fast becoming "less:"

- Less clean air to breathe in congested urban cities
- Less clean water to drink all over the world
- Less fertility in the soil, even as we add more fertilizers
- Less confidence in our children's future

The dominant industrial world view of success has led us to assume competition and innovation will save us, that we can accomplish a technological "fix" of deteriorating biological and human conditions. Evidence does not support this view.

Continuing to define success from primarily material and human-centered viewpoints is no longer adequate—for us, for our children, and for other life on Earth. The so-called "good life" has become a double-edged sword, with wealth for the few next to poverty for the many. The result has been an increasingly unhealthy environment for the planet that we all share.

The unhealthy environment includes not only a degraded natural world, but our moral life as well. So long as success is defined as material consumption and high-tech lifestyles, we separate ourselves from other people, from nature, and from spirit, which comes in communion with each.

## **THREE NEW POINTS OF SUCCESS**

Can we use human creativity to redefine success and help heal the earth? In so doing, can we

preserve qualities of body and spirit that would otherwise be lost?

I think we can, if we measure success by three new standards: meaning, purpose and relationships.

### ***Meaning***

The lifestyle of those who define success in terms of consumption is often marked by isolation, loneliness and fear. When you've got lots of things, there is a lot to lose, a lot to protect, and a lot to pay for. Happiness defined by material consumption is the least likely to last.

We certainly require material aspects to live—clothing, food, shelter, arts. But how much is enough? Simply having more things is not guarantee for meaning in life. This is especially true for the affluent with the reality that so many others are desperate for basic human needs.

### ***Purpose***

A common definition of success implies that the purpose of life is to compete. Life is a game with winners and losers. A "successful" person learns the rules, prepares for the game, competes fairly...and wins.

But what do we win when we win? Competition is great for sports—it can bring out the best, whether we come out on top or not—because in sports the purpose of competition is to promote excellence in players and teams—to build character.

But competition as a dominant metaphor for life—in economics, politics, society—assumes fairness—a level playing field—which often is lacking. Competition too easily becomes a rationale for supremacy, survival at all costs, and "us against the world" appeals by fear-mongering leaders.

None of the world's great religions equate success with competition. Rather, each has a version of what Christians call the "golden rule." Do to others as you would have others do to you. Love one another.

### ***Relationships***

There is a growing hunger for community in America. People yearn for deeper relationships, which give life meaning and purpose.

What is your capacity for connectedness?

A good definition of community is "our capacity for connectedness." Community has to do with our ability to connect deeply with others. And community must include our ability to connect with the natural world and the diverse species that make our life possible.

### **THE GRACE THAT IS THE GIFT OF LIFE CAN ONLY BE HELD IN COMMON**

Deeply connected relationships lead us to redefine success in terms of service. Service does not exclude material aspects of life but gives emphasis to meaning, purpose and connectedness. True success is best measured by how we creatively invest our abilities and resources in service of others. This is an investment in mindset, of *both* financial capital *and* human spirit. To use an agricultural image, it has to do with sowing more than we read.

Over a generation ago, Robert F. Kennedy said:

"The economy measures neither our wit nor our courage, neither our wisdom nor our learning, neither our compasion nor our devotion to country. It measures everything, in short, except that which makes life worthwhile; and it can tell us everything about America—except whether we are proud to be Americans."

The plain fact is that five billion of us cannot have all the things we want! We need to redefine success in terms of "that which makes life worthwhile."

The world needs more peacemakers, healers, restorers, storytellers and lovers of every kind. It needs people who will live their lives well in their homes and with respect for their neighbors. It needs

people of moral courage with the capacity for  
connectedness.

The grace that is the gift of life can only be held in  
common.

The measure of this grace is not in our lifestyles,  
but in our souls.

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