

ON *PURPOSE*

THE DRAIN OF INDECISION

by Richard J. Leider

"Is there something out there for me?" I hear this question daily in relation to right work, and I don't have an easy answer. I've stopped looking for easy answers. I've tried too many times. But if we are to live a fulfilled life we must find some answers! We cannot continue to live with destructive indecision because indecision drains our vital life energy.

To make any decision, to take any positive step is better than draining our joy through indecision. Even a bad choice can be more constructive than suffocating in indecision. Clarifying what we want can be a positive source of new energy.

"Is there something out there for me?" My answer always begins the same way: initiate a *process of change*. Perhaps most of us cannot make a giant decision all at once. However we can begin a process of change by making some small decisions. Making small decisions can be a powerful and liberating effort.

Decisions are not easy; but my years of experience in writing and coaching have led me to believe that the art of decision-making can be learned. Many of us continue to make the same mistakes in dealing with life decisions, repeating destructive patterns that drain our energy. We refuse to take small risks that can save our lives; we even ask God to do what we must do for ourselves. If we are to live a fulfilled life we must change; we must find new purpose and direction.

Friends can help but no one, no matter how loving, can really do it for us. Change is a process. It takes effort and time. This may be hard to accept, but when we cease looking for answers outside ourselves, we discover the energizing spirit of the God or Power within.

To be effective, decision-making must involve reflection and planning. Sometimes what looks like

impulsive behavior is actually the result of knowing what we want.

Recently a traveler on one of my African safaris decided to leave his comfortable, middle-class, college-professor existence in Michigan, buy an RV and travel the country. He sold everything and just took off! The last time I talked with him he was interviewing elders and videotaping their "life stories." He was planning on teaching Life Storytelling at elderhostels and writing a book on the subject.

In attempting an early retirement from teaching, he rethought his position hundreds of times before he was prepared to make a decision. He fantasized about leaving teaching, about traveling and writing, but he continued to live the predictable life that increasingly made less sense to him. He was drained by indecision. He could not accept teaching as it was, nor could he be honest with himself and take his leave.

He continued to fantasize himself out of the situation, stayed in teaching out of financial fear and continued to be confused about who he was and what he wanted. His energy was constantly drained.

In Africa he engaged in the beginnings of a process of change. He knew what he wanted and had known it for years. It took him a year and half to unpack and repack his bags. Today he sounds as thrilled as the moment he wrote down his first decisions and shared them with me in Africa.

It helps to write down the risks that we would like to take and to share them with someone else. Often we know things we would like to do but we never do more than talk about them. Perhaps many of our ideas are illusions and we can finally abandon them. But others are real and require us to take a "leap of faith," which permits us to move to a new place, to go

back to school, to end or begin a relationship, to explore a new way of life, to change jobs or find new meaning in a life grown dull.

The most difficult decision of all is to surrender to the persistent "inner voice" that has been telling us to begin the change process and let go of what is draining our life's energy.

My African traveler friend's unusual risk has given him a whole new vision of life and will probably free him to create a life beyond his current vision. The nice thing about taking a risk is that it leads to greater risks, helping us make our life the joy that it can be.

Beginning the change process is an admission that we are penciled in on the life calendar for a short time and that life can soon pass us by. We do not have forever. We must get on with it. Now. Deciding to begin the change process is the single best way to break out of a routine that is draining our energy and create the kind of life we deserve.

Inventure Coach Tips:

- Prolonged indecision drains energy and can lead to illness.
- Bad decisions can be better than no decision (at least, decide not to decide!)
- Write down the risks that you would like to take and share them with someone else.
- Take a small risk and make the leap of faith that crosses the edge of your fear.

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Inventure Coach

[Editor's Note: The following letter prompted Richard Leider's article, *The Drain of Indecision*.]

Dear Richard:

I have a question that has no easy answers. At mid-life (45), I find myself in the enviable position of having a great marriage, excellent health, an active personal life, and I like where I live. The problem is I want to be working again but I feel stymied in my quest for good work. I think that's because now that I have created this lovely, sane, low-stress life I

am not willing to give it up just to be working again. But, I need work to feel fulfilled.

Over the past decade the work world, in my mind, has become a very unappealing, dysfunctional, bottom-line place in which to work. There doesn't seem to be much fun, nobility or relaxation in the workplace anymore. Everything is moving at a pace way too fast for most human beings.

I am making a career change from my higher education/career counseling work into something that better fits my interest in philosophical and psychological issues. Making money for a company is not my primary motivation, and I do not see further formal education as a vehicle to a new career.

I'm a "juicer." I like to mix things up, debate social issues, build/create/design—not maintain the status quo. I'm the one who says, "the emperor has no clothes." I am looking for challenging, ethical work, a sane work environment with decent people and plenty of autonomy and recognition.

Is there something out there for me? What kind of work will meet my needs and still allow me to maintain my health, sanity and personal life?

*Sincerely,
No Easy Answers*

Secrets

By Dan Petersen

I was reading John O'Neil's book, *The Paradox of Success*, last night. He described cutting to the chase with corporate consulting by asking the question, "What are the company secrets?" This sounds like a bold opener but the quality of O'Neil's writing tells me that he is probably a very effective consultant and coach.

In that question, he is saying that the hidden and unspoken thoughts within the members of a

corporate system are core to the problems for which he has been called to help.

I am not clear on the issues he is working with, but I believe they are in the arena of purpose, intention, meaning and above all, having people know how to work together and support each other.

Many consultants agree that when people come together under circumstances in which they are free to voice the unsaid secrets, businesses become infused with creativity and less intimidated by change.

The same is true with individuals. We are more creative when we aren't afraid or intimidated to share more information about ourselves. It's as if the act of hiding keeps us from looking outside of the box and seeing bigger pictures.

It's more and more apparent to me that this is the work of the coach/consultant: To help people imagine other possibilities for themselves in their business and their personal lives. John O'Neil is saying that opening our focus goes hand in hand with self-disclosure.

Telling the truth that has not been told before is outgrowing our fears around trust. To be able to trust others is a function of trusting ourselves. When we trust ourselves, we will know what is appropriate to disclose and what is not. We will also know that we can trust ourselves to know when and how to tell the truth.

That is our challenge: To provoke clients to drop the filters to their capabilities, including taboos around self-disclosure.

Life coach Todd Pearson has been stressing the impact of secrets on society. Todd speaks of this pattern with the Jungian term "shadow." Jung described shadow as the "unlived part of us," that part of us that can be a pathway to living life more fully and more "whole." Is that not a job of a coach?

Most coaching work involves having clients see more of their potential and living it out. Todd reminds us that we live in the soup of collective shadow and, therefore, it is important to understand cultural taboos and the grip they have on people, many of whom may not be living a fully expressed and authentic life.

This brings us back to the importance of coaches giving their clients the space to be heard without judgement and opinion. Unconditional, positive regard is the space in which such self-acknowledgment and self-acceptance surface as preparation for getting outside of the confining box.

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How Many "Baseball Caps" Do We Have?

By Tom Lutes

Steve sits in the back, in fact so far back he's almost out the door. His large white arms fold across a huge extended belly. Baseball cap tugged down firmly in place. He's real big and he's got a real attitude. His tightened jaw accentuates the glowering eyes staring out at me from deep inside his skull. He's mad. Damn mad. In fact, terminally mad. It's just a matter of degrees, and today he's definitely in no mood to talk about it, especially not in our "little communication workshop" he was "forced" to attend.

Steve's so disgusted and has been that way for so long, he can barely utter any words about it, except to spit out disdain for "them." He's worked 32 years in the coal-fired power plants of Detroit pumping out power so half the state of Michigan can keep running. His father, his brother and two sons used to work here too.

He turns away from me, staring off into his anger. I imagine he's being carried back to the "old days"

I've heard so much about, when people "loved their work," were "proud of the company," the "family atmosphere" and their "place" in the community. But it's not that way now. Not at all. Now he just wants to get back at "them," do as little as possible and get as much as he can. "Screw them back" is his one remaining act of inspiration after 32 years of what the company calls service. "You bet! Get all I can and stick it to them. Over and over, much as I can. They deserve it and more for all the crap I've had to take. Ya, I get paid well, damn sure better after putting up with all their lies all these years."

He never wanted a career, that was for those "college types." All he wanted was a job. Just do a good job and go home. Doing the same thing for 30 years was just fine. He didn't need to improve every day, just do a good job and go home. Didn't need to be everyone's boss, just to be treated "fair" for a good day's work. And that's how it was for quite a while. Then somehow the rules changed. Suddenly it wasn't just show up on time and do what was expected. Now you had to learn to "communicate," "diversify" and "do sissy stuff like this class."

For guys like Steve it's all so upside down now: aging white men ("dinosaurs" as they call themselves) whose privilege has disappeared; minorities having immense power with the boss; women who never worked your job a day in their life now deciding your fate; Wall Street telling you what productivity is; shareholder value being all that management cares about, and people getting rich doing nothing.

"Got to be the lowest scum on earth these days to actually go to work every day and do a real job. You know, actually DO something not just push paper around. Seems like everyone's just trying to work a couple hours at home and scam big money off the stock price of some internet company that's done nothing yet in the real world. Who's actually working these days and what kind of respect do they get?" He burns the last sentence into my eyes with his.

Who can he blame for his simmering resentment? Certainly not "them." Management hides behind layers of management working ever so closely with even more layers of lawyers. Steve is caught. Like so many others he feels stuffed into some irrelevant in-seam of our national grab for profits. Steve is a heartfelt man, yet he can feel no heart in the world of work these days.

A surly, tough survivor in a corporate culture built to reward first at the top and last at the bottom, he views the world entrenched behind an angry, aggressive exterior. For so long he has stayed so rigid in his hatred of management that he is now frozen in place. Through the years of aging, his rigidity hardened and the person who was once so young and strong has now become almost brittle. Hiding behind the need for structure, certainty and routine, vulnerability is the last thing people like Steve will ever admit or want anyone to see. Instead they cling to the stability of their anger, bonding around a common disgust for "them" and put-down jokes of how each other used to be.

"Lies and covering their asses, that's all they're good for. Why should I care? They don't. All they care about is their careers and making sure they look good. The threat of a law suit is all they understand. Efficiency? That's the biggest load of crap I ever heard. All efficiency means to management is cutting out jobs at the bottom and making us work harder with less safety. It never means cutting out layers of stupid managers, sitting around on their butts. Only three more years and I'm outta here. Sooner if they give me half a chance."

There it is again, the "R" word. That beacon of light at the end of the tunnel, nirvana just over the hill—RETIREMENT. That long awaited, hard-earned moment when it's all going to be OK. The moment the deeply internalized resentment will suddenly dry up and go away. Too old to turn back, too proud to forgive and too narrow to understand, Steve resides in his own bitter feelings. Strung taut between a world moving too fast to accept and his hope for the good old days, Steve stew in his juice of injustice, waiting for that day of redemption

when retirement finally provides the illusion of total relief.

I'm leading a one-day communication workshop. Steve is one of approximately 6,000 people who will do the program in the coming four months. It's part of a multi-phase, multi-year effort to begin to heal immense communication gaps between the upper and lower eschelons of the company. Born out of a desire by upper management to begin some kind of healing process, this phase of the program is for mostly union employees from the power plants and service centers. They are ordered to come whether they like it or not. As a result, easily 80% have an attitude when they walk in the door and make no bones about not wanting to be there. Speaking with similar degrees of intensity and bitterness, many have the same stories of management's cutthroat deceit and looking out only for itself. Steve is just one person out of a whole class of people within this company and, I suspect, many more around our country who feel this way.

We have a 10-person facilitator team representing a diverse balance in both race and gender. Each week we meet and discuss how we can work more effectively with the groups, have more impact and better deal with the anger we face. About half way through our 16-week run, the team begins to give voice to the following politically touchy observation: always the difficulty of our day as facilitators comes down to one major factor—how many "baseball caps" do we have?

With slight variations in shape and size and attitude, it's always the same: glowering eyes, baseball cap pulled down tight, arms folded—always folded—across the chest, older, strong, white. We know the day will go relatively easy when we look out at our audience and see at least one-third minorities or women. However, usually these days our groups consist of very few minorities or women, and we know we're in for a battle.

What happened to these apparently once happy and content people? It takes constant effort over a long period of time to turn a positive experience into such a deeply ingrained sense of betrayal and

rejection. Can we lay it at the feet of executives and managers who made long strings of self-promotional, inept and, in some cases, unconscionable decisions? Can we point to the people at the top for rewarding the wrong behavior, taking the easy way out, and avoiding responsibility for a dysfunctional culture set more firmly in place each step of the way? Certainly we can. No question about it.

These executives are not much different than anyone else. They carry the usual human baggage: self-centered concerns, a penchant for talking when they should be listening, short-sighted decision making and impatience with individuals unlike themselves. Yet, I met none I would call uncaring or indifferent. They too are caught in this destructive tangle, except their role is to get over-paid and over-blamed.

Too many stories of corporate injustice end with fingers pointed at someone. If the inquiry stops there we end up with yet another typical victim story perpetrated by those decision makers at the top, who are certainly contributing. But it is only half the truth. What about the people themselves—the workers? Innocent victims of management? Not hardly!

Equally the workers have played their part by doggedly reaffirming that which they propose to hate through continually selling out to the convenience of making no waves and going along with everything. An unaccountable culture breeds people at all levels willing to accept a reality where everyone gets to blame someone else for what they feel and experience. The finger points up if you are down and down if you are up. Trapped in a collective mindset too all-confirming to avoid, the tail-chasing, finger-pointing merry-go-round entrenches itself deeper and deeper into the minds of all involved.

Most of the workers I met, like Steve, accept the notion that you can separate your life from your work. "No problem. You just walk out that door at the end of the day and leave it all behind. Every day. Every single day I just walk away from it."

Turning off feeling, closing off caring and compartmentalizing it all—as though the 40-plus hours each week isn't a significant hunk of your life experience—certainly can't be called an optimal response. Adaptive, yes. Understandable, definitely. Certainly all that many know how to do, but it's hardly functional in the sense of leading one to a more satisfying, creative relationship to self, others and life in general.

Seduced by the opiate of health insurance benefits and retirement income where they can at last "do what I want," workers often stay long after they desire to leave and just resentfully ride out their remaining time. "Why would you do that?" I ask Steve. "Man, you can't just throw away 32 years," he drills forcefully into me. So on he dances.

Dangling on the hook, Steve swallowed the notion that he was protecting himself for the future by living a life that he hates in the present. Twisting in the wind as change blows through his industry, the Steves of the world are paralyzed by the feeling that they got screwed. And it's true. They have, but not only by someone else.

Really what eats its way slowly into a seething awareness is that no matter how much they give you on your retirement day, they got you. You didn't have the courage not to buy the entire game. Your sell-out is no bigger than the others, you just have to wake up every day and feel yours, retired or not.

The company is changing? Communicate those things that bother you? In Steve's world it's all gone way too far for that, and definitely too far to communicate about. For buried too deep is the personal knowledge that behind all that anger about "them" and all those extra pounds of bluster hides a child who got caught in the web of going along with it all. Suddenly his choices ran out, the illusion thickened into concrete and the walls of his personal prison became remarkably clear—way too clear to talk about in some "little communication workshop" they forced him to come to. As Steve says, "They want me to communicate? Who are they kidding? It will never work."

Freedom is not being set out to pasture after a lifetime of avoiding thinking for yourself. Integrity is not some mythical corporate platitude. And victim is not only about what's going on in the newspaper headlines. The ever-increasing grip of consensus reality sold to us every day and every way need not be something that wins every round. You don't have to attack and you don't have to dance to its tune. Choices for freedom come in the quiet of one's own conscience. They happen through being awake to your spirit's drive for sovereignty.

It is the mystery of life that calls us forward and eternally awakens us from slumber. The longer we resist the harder it is; yet, the only way out is straight through the front door. It means stepping into the uncertainty and communicating that which is difficult to say and open-heartedly hearing the same from another. It means taking action based on what you hear and say. These small risks of regularly telling and hearing the truth from our friends and co-workers conditions us to release the effort of trying to control life and to accept the wisdom that indeed it is only the truth which will ever set us free.

People like Steve and so many others—top to bottom—have become trapped only by their own lack of telling and hearing their own truth. The heart Steve is looking for must first come from himself. It is his own words he most needs to hear. The despair in this company, like so many others, exists because too many people are not listening to themselves and then taking their own needed advice.

Steve's real hunger is for relationship. The company he joined 32 years ago was all about relationship; now it's about control. Earlier he played the game of excellence. Now he plays the game of how little can I do and how much can I get. Before he was happy, now he is not. He is certainly justified to feel as he does. But now what?

All of us have the ongoing responsibility to notice what draws our attention and what we give our

energy to, and then to understand how these momentary choices begin to create the reality of our life. The "little communication workshop" simply called attention to people's habitual mindset, pointed out its power, then showed them they have some choice in the matter.

How do you regain a positive mindset and reclaim your own destiny? Truth is the only way out. Step into the uncertainty. Once accustomed to the journey of authentic truth, the choice to march in place for safety's sake quickly disappears, no matter how many benefits are offered.

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