



Finding Our Way: a Workshop on Self Re-Discovery

WEEK 2

Osher Lifelong Learning Institute at George Mason University

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Week 2 – Building New Life-Style Patterns

- ▶ The life structure we've moved beyond
- ▶ Adding back in what is "missing"
- ▶ Discovering our new "You"
 - ▶ Paths that open before us
 - ▶ Adding richness to our chosen Path
- ▶ Sharing.....

We've Mastered Key Skills for Adult Life

- **We're "Grow up"** – learned to manage our life, choices, resources, energies, relationships
- **Completed our education** – with high grades and correctly chosen majors
- **Created short and long-term social relationships** and networked connections
- **Established our "presence"** among our peers and those older (and younger) than us; those in other economic and professional circles; communities
- **Created "home"** – decide where and how to live; establish a "style" for living
- **Found (and in some cases, lost) a life partner** (for most adults in our generation)
- **Established a "family" (or equivalent** in terms of community and social engagement) and dedicated attention, caring, resources to their well-being (until they developed their own mastery)
- Came to terms with (and/or seek to follow) **call to "Spirit"** and/or engagement in formal religious pursuits
- **Mastered chosen career or profession** and continued movement deeper and more broadly and embraced skills necessary to producing at higher levels of challenge and achievement
- **Made money and learned to manage it;** planned for funding future "post employment" financing

End Job/Empty Nest – everything changed!

- Structure, regularity, routine
- Purpose, focus; goals; progress monitoring
- Project/ task focus. Methods. Standards
- Friends and colleagues; Collaborating teams; recognition; continuity
- Meaningful engagement; goals; measures of “success”
- Finances; rewards

Some of these were really important to me

- ▶ Structure –
- ▶ Large, meaningful tasks
- ▶ Mattering
- ▶ Companionship/team
- ▶ Specific tasks
- ▶ Accountability
- ▶ Money
- ▶ Reward
- ▶ Measure progress

But then -- My "play" can now provide

- ▶ New "routines" or none! Set my own schedule and "style"
- ▶ Enough time to sleep!
- ▶ Time to "play"
- ▶ My "purpose" and "focus" are mine to choose
- ▶ I have time to *make new friends and spend time with them*
- ▶ I choose my goals and my own measures of "success". I define my own "status"
- ▶ I could even become an investment genius!

My daily Structure has changed..

- ▶ We have more time
- ▶ Our time is our own to pace and use. “Driven-ness” disappears; choice opens up.
- ▶ Our wardrobe changes – we wear what we want.
 - ▶ But elegant loafers and spike heels don’t work on cobblestone pavements in Rome
 - ▶ Serious gym work requires a whole new wardrobe
 - ▶ Goodwill becomes our friend
- ▶ Home space – dining room or art studio? Car storage or furniture making shop or kiln room?

How do I Matter ...

Without regular/paid work and/or after the kids leave, what/who are we?

- ▶ When we were/are working/parenting/homemaking, we have self-meaning/worth as measured by salary, appreciation, growth of family
- ▶ But, in truth our significance is not solely driven by a paid work identity or our role as parent and community member..
- ▶ What matters to us now??
 - ▶ Have some importance to others
 - ▶ Be noticed, appreciated, needed
 - ▶ Know that others are concerned about us – interested in
- ▶ Our new measure – the meaning we make in the world as *we know it and feel called to contribute*

Looking at what “Calls us”

- ▶ What am I noticing
- ▶ What is showing up in my Journaling
- ▶ What seems to be “calling” me
- ▶ What have I started new these last couple of weeks
- ▶ What is “in my way”?
- ▶ What will it take to set off on that New Life Adventure Trekk?

I miss being engaged in “large, meaningful tasks” ...

WE GET TO DECIDE...

- What is “meaningful” to us
- Choose what we will spend our time on
- The tasks required to achieve our goals
- The activities we will engage in -- daily → weekly → monthly

AND

- We set the pace
- We set the milestones

AND MOST IMPORTANTLY

- **We decide to get rid of distracting time-eating annoyances** (shut off those spam phone calls and emails; political news; grocery lists; endless clean up/fix up distractions ...)

I still want to be goal-directed. I get more done if I have to-do lists or “tasks”

- ▶ I don't want to fall into the “couch potato” trap --- lazing around with no focus as days slip by
- ▶ Make plans step by step that will achieve goals. Write them down. Stick to them.
- ▶ I can check my progress and make changes in my plans and tasks
- ▶ I can take time to log events and tasks onto my calendar and set reminders (choose the tones carefully)
- ▶ When I go to bed, I could already have a plan for the next day. Sure I can change it but I have an intention

I want to notice my progress and stay accountable – at least to myself

- Set goals – and meet them.
 - “I’ll enter at least one painting into an art show this year.”
 - “I’ll climb at least one mountain this year.”
 - I’ll enter a 5K in the fall. I will run a strong 3 K by mid-summer.
- Make promises to yourself – to others. KEEP THEM!
- Brag (report) to someone what you have planned. Let them know how you’re progressing.
- Join “interest groups” and networks. Meetups.
- We are our own timekeeper
- We set our own performance standards and become our own judge

Where's my Team?

- Who are my day-to-day Companions?
- Who notices if I don't show up?
- Who are my "play-mates" - colleagues?
- Who do we turn to for help; shared effort? Consolation? Encouragement?
- How will we stay in touch with our old Work Family? How do we stay relevant to each other?

New family and friend opportunities open up

- You finally have time for "family" and "friends" - take advantage of it.
- Join interest groups
- Connecting with new folks - "choose the right gym" or tennis club or volunteer group
- Be persistent in staying connected -- Skype; Zoom; Messaging... surprising connections across the world.
- Don't forget the neighbors and community can always use help...

We Need Friends

*We need a sense of belonging ~ connection ~ nurturance
~ sharing ~ value ~ guidance ~ perspective*

- Keep and build *social capital*. Where is my *membership*? My *belonging*?
- With whom will I schmooze? need colleagues – team mates –
- Deepen existing relationships
- Reconnect with past friends who have been the fellow travelers... in my life ...in my work
- Refresh the web of kinship – “All my relations...”
 - Fill in lost decades – revelations and discoveries
 - Reknit the thread of continuity and affection
 - Kinfolk help us grow. They know who we once were and witness the one we are now and want to be
- Make NEW friends – everywhere you go -- all ages and descriptions

Keeping Mentally and Emotionally Fit

- ▶ Acknowledge our emotions. Allow our rich range of feelings to come to the surface.
- ▶ Don't be afraid to seek therapeutic assistance
- ▶ We may be challenged by "divided attention tasks" or no longer have retention capabilities that we once mastered
- ▶ Mental muscles need exercise. Remember the joy of *working your mind FOR PLEASURE*, not a paycheck. Study. Read. Learn an instrument. Master computers.
- ▶ What mental skills have we let atrophy over the years? (Examples: "New Math"; learning Mandarin. Relearning Piano) Why not (re)learn these skills?
- ▶ The good part: we have larger vocabulary, deeper knowledge, more experience, emotional stability; can handle stress; reliability. We have mastered multiple ways of learning.
- ▶ Realistic concern: Fear of loss of earlier mental capabilities → Alzheimer's fear. But 85% of people over 85 will NOT have it! Get tested if you're concerned
- ▶ Emergent Neuroscience findings: the BRAIN DOES GROW new cells (contrary to what we were taught in the past!)

Finding Our Way – the “Call of Spirit”

- Search to find the meaning or pattern of our Life Journey Path
- (Re)Discover the form of spiritual expression that you recognize as your Path/Way
- Reconnect with the faith practice of our childhood or earlier adulthood
- Experience new faith/belief/ritual communities – what do these invite us to be aware of beyond the “mere human” life?
- Follow the urge to EXPRESS YOURSELF - To paint, or write, to meditate or go into therapy; build objects; tend gardens... and follow where it takes you.
- Give to others – reconnect with the circle of humanity – the Earth -- Beyond
- Awaken to my personal Epiphany -- touching in with the “Sacred” –
- “I’m new! Something is calling me forward!

Living beyond ourselves: Gifting Others

- ▶ Awaken to deeper awareness of concern for people besides self and family (now that we mastered the “adult life challenges – we have time to notice this...)
- ▶ Desire to nurture and guide younger people and contribute to the next generation
- ▶ Community building
 - ▶ Mentoring
 - ▶ Empathetic leadership
 - ▶ Steer towards the greater good
- ▶ Concern for the global community –
- ▶ And “Cosmic” ...

Living beyond ourselves: Our Legacy

- **What have I accomplished in this Life Phase?**
- What have I learned? What are the unifying principles of my life?
- Writing: journals, memory books, photo collages as gift from me to the future
- Explore the deeper meanings.
 - What I know about what my life is about?
 - My Times
 - My Values
 - Summary of Life Review: "Have I mattered?" "How?"
- **What traces of ME and the life I have lived will I leave behind**

Harvesting the \$\$\$ we planted

- ▶ “Income withdrawal syndrome” offers interesting challenges
- ▶ It’s never too late to learn to understand the financial pages. Add a financial advisor to your “specialist” list
- ▶ Work-related budgeting changes to “working for myself” budgeting
- ▶ If all else fails: There are always opportunities out there to find paid parttime work – in the “TaskRabbit” world
- ▶ We have plenty of years before “senior living” but not time like the present to think about it and have a plan.

We deserve Rewards

- ▶ How do we reward ourselves for achieving goals?
- ▶ Yes – take a nap; go to a movie; go out to dinner
 - ▶ *But -- avoid the over-eating, drinking and over-sleeping reward traps*
- ▶ Take a short weekend trip
- ▶ Visit an old friend
- ▶ Get the dining room painted
- ▶ Give yourself gold stars and post them on a mirror

TIME FOR GROUP STORIES and SHARING

21