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Discovering you

Do you know who you are?

“I don't have time to plan my life. I'm too busy deciding where to eat.” Sound ridiculous? Think for a moment of the cumulative hours you've spent choosing a restaurant. Now, contrast that with the total time you've invested in mapping the course of your life — not day-dreaming, but actually creating a vision of who you want to become, what you want to do and what it all means.

I was there once. And when I became clear about what I wanted, a miracle happened.

Try this simple exercise. Raise your right hand and extend your index finger. Now, point north. If your goal in life were to go north, you would start to run in the direction you had pointed. Along your journey, you would read books on running, set goals for your distance and time, try to improve your pace and form, and try to maintain a positive mental attitude.

Above all, you would run hard. In the end, you would stop, exhausted, having given all that you had to go north. But what if all that time you were running east?

It is critical that we find our own true north and set a clear direction for our lives before we spend years running the race. To do that, focus on three life-changing questions: Who are you? What do you want? What are you prepared to do?

Knowing yourself

If I met you at a business conference and casually asked, “Who are you?” you would

Jim Huling The Business of Life

probably say, “I'm Sam and I'm the (job title) for (company name).”

But if I got to know you and then said, “Sam, who are you really?” you would give a deeper answer, an answer that would include the things you care about in addition to your work.

This is how we begin to set the direction of our lives — by starting with a deeper definition of who we really are. Try it right now. Make a list of the things you care about in terms of your roles.

My list includes roles such as Donna's husband, CEO, martial artist and friend. Make sure the list has every role you want your life to include, even if you're not currently investing in it.

If you did the exercise, you were probably struck by how many roles you listed beyond the basics. Did you also find that you remembered something you once dreamed of but had forgotten?

When we finally slow down to ask ourselves real questions, we start to get real answers. And, we remember the dreams we once had before the pressure of our day-to-day responsibilities started to consume us.

Think back over the past month. Place a check mark beside each role on the list in which you invested five or more hours. Now, circle the most important role that doesn't have a check mark beside it.

Stunning, isn't it? This is what's called a BFO — a Blinding Flash of the Obvious — where we start to see the gap between the life we want and the life we are living. Usually, the role that is circled is one that is truly important to us. Accumulate enough of these, and your deathbed experience will be one giant BFO of all that you missed out on in life.

Now it's time to make a new list. Take all the roles you've identified and rewrite them in priority order, starting with the role that is the most important in your life and continuing in order of decreasing importance. The most powerful way to answer the question, “Who are you?” is to first decide who you want to be.

Like a compass pointing to true north, knowing who we are sets the direction for life.



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