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Understanding who you are

Take the time to identify the aspects of your life that define who you are. **By Jim Huling**

In the early '80s, I was a member of a cult. It was a worldwide movement with membership in the hundreds of thousands, requiring total devotion to its cause.

You might have thought of it as an international corporation offering services to the *Fortune* 100, but believe me, for those of us who worked there, it was a cult. Early on, we were indoctrinated with a single overriding message: Your job is the most important thing in your life.

As young, ambitious professionals, it was easy to believe the message, and once we started to believe it, we were hooked. We worked 80 hours per week, traveled constantly and said yes to every assignment.

Alone in a hotel one night during a two-year assignment, I was reading a new book, "The 7 Habits of Highly Successful People." The author, Stephen Covey, suggested something radical — that we define our lives not by our jobs but by the things we care most about.

I listed the various things that were important to me in terms of my roles: Donna's husband, Scott's dad, Sarah's dad, business leader, writer and friend, and when I looked at the list, I was struck by how many aspects of my life were important to me beyond my job.

Next, I built a compelling vision of all that I wanted to do, who I wanted to become in each role. To get this vision, I imagined my own eulogy, the words that would be said at the time of my passing.

I started with my newest role — father to my beautiful baby girl, Sarah. In my mind, I saw Sarah, many years in the future, standing in front of our friends and family to describe what her relationship with her Dad meant to her. I then wrote one sentence on the tablet in front of me, a sentence that changed my life. I imagined Sarah saying, "My Dad was always there for me."

The Business of Life

Editor's Note: Welcome to our new column, The Business of Life. Elsewhere in this publication, you will find the best available insights for excellence in business, from financial to legal to strategic. In Jim Huling's column, you will find something different — a focus on the business of living a great life.

Only, I wasn't there. I was away, as I had often been, giving everything to my job.

As I stared at that sentence, my heart broke open. I wrote pages and pages in the most visionary experience I have ever had. I wrote about what I wanted to be, the moments I wanted to share, the heart connection I wanted to make.

On the following Monday, I walked into cult headquarters and resigned. Today, I might handle this decision differently — the word "transition" comes to mind — but on that day, I had a vision so clear, so real, so compelling, that I had no choice but to live it out.

In the years that have passed, Sarah and I have lived out everything that I envisioned, from dozens of backpacking trips and rock-climbing expeditions to kayaking, whitewater rafting, earning our black belts in taekwondo, and so on. Today, I could tell the same story, as husband to Donna, dad to Scott, CEO of a highly successful company and many other things.

In the process, I've been able to build a great life and a great career. This is what I mean by the business of life — having a vision of what you want and the ability to bring that vision into reality.

Here are three questions to get you start-

ed. I have come to believe that they are the most important we can ever answer.

■ **Who are you?** Beyond all surface descriptions, who are you really?

Action item: List the roles in your life and rank them by priority.

■ **What do you want?** Do you have a clear vision? Are you living your life "on purpose?"

Action item: Write a personal eulogy for your highest priority role.

■ **What are you prepared to do?** This is the most important question of all.

Action item: Set one goal for this year that will take you toward living out that vision.

Recently, I watched Sarah receive her high school diploma as a lifetime honor roll student. As one chapter of my life was ending and a new one beginning, I realized that I had become the dad I envisioned all those years ago, and my joy at the memory of all that Sarah and I had shared was beyond description.

You really can have it all. In "The Business of Life," I'll show you how.



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