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Introduction

The path is wiser than the one who travels it.

It seems like everything began with my father's death. First came the agony and the days of anguish; and then, even more painful, my awakening to a piercing revelation that was impossible to avoid. My father died in his prime because he no longer found meaning in his work. A wonderful, talented man, he never learned how to channel his abilities. His work, which was contrary to his calling, simply did him in.

Over the years, my father's "vocational death" became central to my own professional life. What began as a memorial to his death, now became my lighthouse. Over decades of work, I translated his pain into a broader human dimension and transformed it into my career. I met hundreds of unfulfilled people who were "vocationally stuck," and I gained a fresh perspective on their quest for the path to self-expression while sharing their struggles and basking in their victories. I learned that work or career can be either a disease, or a cure, depending on the choice an individual makes.

For most people, the simplest of questions always looms large.

"What profession suits me anyhow, and what is my true calling?"

I learned that the absence of self-realization can destroy a person, and not merely the individual alone. This kind of distress is often deeply engraved in the family psycho-genes, sometimes for generations. Through counseling people with vocational dilemmas and researching job seekers and those in search of career change, a striking revelation hit me. One of the greatest grudges that children harbor towards their parents, often exceeding anger over financial issues, infidelity, abuse, or even abandonment, is the



resentment a child feels towards a parent who has missed the boat, who has not felt entitled to a meaningful life.

Career Your Passion was born from my yearning to inscribe the journeys I have traveled over decades. Solitary journeys, and journeys with others – journeys with people who became stuck in their work, in their career, and in fulfilling their life mission. The people whose journeys are shared here are people who chose to set out on a career quest, and it was the act of choice that inspired them to reach their respective destinations. This book was born from my long-standing belief that “The path is wiser than the one who travels it.” I believe that deep down inside them, people know whether they are on the right track or if they have gone astray.

To fulfill your vision you may need a quest, like biblical Abraham when he left Ur, or what the Maori call a ‘walkabout’. Leave the familiar and set out on a journey to discover yourself and your hidden inner worlds. By traveling far from your motherland, from all that is familiar and especially from your family home, you will be able to connect to your dreams and desires. Departures and farewells are critical along the path to fulfilling your vision, and the journey to a new land shall inspire you to reconnect creatively to your roots as well as to your family psycho-genes.

In order to facilitate career journeys I have used a three-generational family vocational tree as a working tool. When drawing a map of the family Genogram or even parts of it, a wider understanding of the vocational DNA reservoir is opened for the traveler.

Careers are not only born, they are often made by decoding automatic vocational patterns of behavior that enable free choice. However, when a person’s career becomes their calling, this is when it is at its best, and so is its “owner” and leader...

Work, career, vocation, profession, job, or calling – all of these are different and they reflect diverse emotional work states of mind. I have used each of them according to the state of mind and emotions of my clients.

My approach is both analytical and intuitive. It strives at decoding personal



career patterns; those who facilitate career fulfillment and those who lead to recurrent career impasse.

Impasse, or getting stuck, is sometimes mandatory for our growth and development. The human desire to work in a vocation that is personally fulfilling is an existential need. The struggle to carve out a meaningful life is difficult and painful; it demands tough choices traveling through rough terrain, yet it is filled with vitality and creativity. Missing out on this quest can lead to enormous suffering and sometimes can even be fatal.

I wish for each of you a personal journey that will be true, enduring, and fulfilling. Take a friend on your journey, for “The prisoner cannot surrender his own bonds.” Learn from others and teach yourselves. Make your dreams come true. They know who you are.

Seek your path.

Trust its wisdom.

Follow your inner voice.

Go out there and find your Promised Land.

Orenia Yaffe-Yanai



Chapter One

Receiving the Green Light

I needed someone to give me permission to succeed.

Ever since I can remember, I nurtured hopes for a future of vocational bliss for my father. As a child, I remember closing my eyes and wishing, "Please let Dad wake up in the morning and do something that will make him happy, something that is right for him, something that gives him joy." I wanted him to feel that he had a reason to live. I wanted him to wake up without that beaten look of someone who experiences himself as a failure, unable to create, and incapable of self-expression. Above all, I could never understand why the great love he had for his family and especially for me, was never enough to grant him happiness and contentment.

After he died, I tried, as a clinical and vocational psychologist, to fathom the secret of his life and death. I discovered that two essential components had been lacking in his work environment. First, he had lacked a meaningful figure who would notice, even by way of criticism, the job he was doing. Second, it devastated him that his work had so little connection to his inner needs, and so little connection to his soul.

My father was a teacher who wanted to be an educator, a mentor, who documents his experiences with students in order to pass them on to others. As a school teacher, he came home day after day increasingly frustrated. He thrived on unmediated interaction with people in a world unsuited to provide it. He felt passed over, a man without a future, a person doomed to the wrong profession.

More than anything else, my father yearned to express himself in writing,



yet was unable to allow himself to put pen to paper. I, too, wished to write, but through years of counseling others, I learned that one can almost never get a green light from an unfulfilled parent. Being asked for this kind of blessing by one's child can bring both pain and happiness beyond what an unfulfilled parent can bear. The happiness that one's child is living the dream is mixed with the pain of envy. The conflict is too painful and thus parental permission is never granted. For consent to be given, one has to struggle on alone, which is never an easy task.

Curiously, it was I who gave him permission to write through a kind of unspoken, prearranged game we shared. When I had a composition to prepare for school I would come to him and say, "Daddy, I can't write this composition; maybe you can do it for me?" He would always gladly agree, seeming to take it for granted that I wasn't capable of it myself, and I, of course, was always willing to sacrifice my own self-expression to let him write for me.

Often, people feel that what they do for a living, or their career choice, is truly painful for them. Along with the pain comes a sense of having missed out, or of being stuck in a rut. Sometimes this distress can bring a person to despair and withdrawal from life, or in extreme cases, can even lead to death.

Over decades of counseling various people seeking vocational quests, I have discovered that those who touched me most were those who resembled my father. They were my comrades on the journey to fulfillment, and they touched an inner wound that never completely healed.

Daniel was one of those people. He had actually chosen the profession that was right for him, but neither he nor his employer knew it. Daniel was unaware that something important was missing in his life: that inner permission to find vocational fulfillment. And he had no parental figures to give him their blessing or their permission.

When he came to me he was thirty-five and had just been notified that he should start looking for another job. He was not overly surprised by being fired, yet something deep within brought him to me and made him begin



asking himself questions even before beginning his job hunt or discussing with his superiors why he had been fired.

Daniel impressed me tremendously with his sensitivity to others. I was astonished by his superior intelligence and the tremendous courage he had mastered to confront the challenges he had set himself.

Although there was something pleasant about him, Daniel was not an especially impressive looking man. Squat and balding, he perspired a lot, dressed carelessly and moved clumsily, yet his eyes were attentive and accepting. An analytical man, Daniel asked precise questions and sought their answers diligently. Daniel felt his career was a failure, mainly because of lack of employer and peer recognition. My empathy was immediate as I recognized the distress that comes from sensing missed opportunities, and of being sidelined. After all, my entire life, I had watched my father suffer the same feelings.

Initially, Daniel was unable to pinpoint the problem. He could not explain why he was being let go by the multimedia company that had employed him from its first day in business. Yet somehow, he realized that something in the way he functioned within the company was flawed. When I asked him about his family, he responded that he lived with his girlfriend and that she was very important to him. They had no children.

Our first session was very tough. Daniel sat there, uneasy, dripping with sweat, smiling a polite, artificial smile. "I don't understand what's happening to me," he said. "I think I just have to find the right profession."

"How do you know that your profession doesn't suit you?" I asked.

"If people don't appreciate what I do, then maybe what I do just isn't right," he replied rapidly.

The words and the feelings struck a familiar chord...

So often, people who are stuck in their career sense only the need for changing the nature and content of their work; that other dimensions might require change simply never occurs to them.

Daniel told me how his career developed together with the growth of the



software firm where he worked, and how he had come to specialize in communication arts and multimedia. It was not clear to him why the people he reported to were dissatisfied with him or what exactly they might be unhappy about.

“Are you good at what you do?” I asked him directly.

“Yes. I think I am. But nobody actually says so.”

“Sometimes people don’t hear because they don’t know how to register approval. They avoid relationships with their colleagues and then miss out on all the compliments. Other people don’t allow themselves to think well of themselves despite truly giving all they have to their work.”

Daniel listened and took a moment to reply.

“I’m a fairly disorganized person, but I do listen to other people...”

“I’ve noticed that,” I assented, “but do you also pay attention when people pay you compliments?”

“Not really,” he replied, weighing his words. “I think that mainly I have been thinking about how good I am at it and not about if I like what I’m doing.”

Daniel and I understood fairly quickly that his place in the organization was not very clear and that his relationships at work required special attention. He had systematically succeeded in neutralizing any attempt on the part of his employer or his customers to think well of him or relate to him constructively. He had even managed to persuade them that his work needed improvement. As a result, Daniel had achieved an ongoing attitude of lack of appreciation of his work.

All of that, however, seemed secondary to him in comparison to his new awareness of failing to take credit for his work in the world of communication arts and multimedia that he so loved.

“If I were to ask at your studio,” I pressed him, “how happy you are with what you do, what would they tell me?”

Daniel was surprised and his brow creased as he answered with his usual candor. “I’ve never really thought about it, but now that you’re asking, they would probably tell you that I’m not happy. As I say that, though, something in



me objects, because deep down I'm really happy with what I do.”

“And are others allowed to know that? Are you permitted to acknowledge it?” I refused to relent.

I vividly recollected my struggle to be happy with myself and with what I do, despite the tormented look my father wore, returning day after day frustrated from his job. It is not easy to be happy, so close to another person's grief.

These painful encounters taught me that a person's real or imagined career dissatisfaction is directly related to the level of the significant parent's feeling of dissatisfaction regarding his/her own career. Hence the son of an unfulfilled father may feel frustrated even if his work suits him and expresses his inner world. It was imperative for Daniel and me to understand his tremendous need to feel unfulfilled and dissatisfied; and why he felt the need to convey this message to his colleagues at work. Quite possibly this even made him create situations where his work would be negatively evaluated.

I told Daniel the story of my father and me, and I suggested he examine his parents' degree of satisfaction with their work. Gradually we reacted the bottom of things. Daniel looked at me like a pilot coping with vertigo for the first time – the instruments in front of him reflected a reality different from the one conveyed to him by his senses... which was correct?

Daniel decided to trust me and began recounting the story of his parents' work histories for the first time in his life.

“I was born,” he said ironically, “to unfulfilled parents. My father was a graphic artist whose talents went unrecognized. He was frustrated and lived with the feeling that he could have done anything. More than anything, he wanted to be an artist.”

“Was your father sad?” I asked, remembering my own father's pain.

“Yes, very,” he replied. “His work and talent were never acknowledged and eventually he gave in to melancholy and alcohol. When I was four, he left home.”

“So in fact, he left you, too.”

“Yes, but I loved him deeply and he loved me back,” replied Daniel with



certainty.

“And this hurt to see your father unable to find himself?”

“It was terrible,” Daniel recalled, “and it was also incomprehensible. Why did he leave? What happened at home? Why wasn’t he respected? What was wrong with him? Even now, it’s not clear to me.”

I saw my father right in front of me. How he secluded himself even within his marriage to my mother. How he abandoned both himself and her emotionally. How he was not there, despite living physically in their shared home. From my father, I also learned that a family can be either a training ground or a killing field for personal development and fulfillment. Sometimes, owing to unbearable distress, overwhelming despair, and a lack of career fulfillment, a person can destroy his/her family relationships.

“Tell me, do you think there are people who leave home because they haven’t found meaning in their lives at work?” asked Daniel pensively.

“Yes,” I replied. “I know that often when couples break up and people leave their homes and families, it’s from a sense of despair, of having let things slip away in terms of their lack of work fulfillment.”

“Why wasn’t my father appreciated?” Daniel asked again.

“You came to me with the same issues,” I said, trying to throw light on the link between the generations, “and that question could be asked about you, too.”

“Yes,” said Daniel. “When I was growing up I thought that my father had always wanted to be an artist and that he had renounced art by choosing graphic design. When I was little, I was afraid something would happen to him...could it be that my father left my mother because of his work frustration?” Daniel seemed frightened by his own words, as if he had now for the first time understood how likely that was.

I suggested that Daniel considered to what extent his parents could perceive his father as an occupational success. A useful tool for doing that can be done by checking the vocational family tree or vocational Genogram over three generations. I suggested that Daniel checked whether the men in his family were considered winners, what they did for a living, and how they related to



other “male” occupations. Families tend to pass behavioral patterns and attitudes from one generation to the next. When these are not consciously identified, family members tend to relive them.

I shared my knowledge from life and literature with Daniel. We both sensed that he was stuck in the grip of a generational legacy, and not that he had chosen the wrong path. He was ready to get in touch with his new feelings involving “permission” to excel and the acceptance of that permission.

When Daniel and I parted at that stage in his journey, he had homework to do. He planned to talk with his mother and father about the work they had done in their lives and what they felt they had missed out on.

He came to our next session in a very emotional state. “You know,” he said, “I discovered that I am a loser, son of a loser, and grandson of a loser. Not only my father, his housepainter Father, too, had seen themselves as vocational failures, and that was the way their families also viewed them. And according to my mother, her father was also dubbed a loser. Do you think it’s hereditary?”

“It can be, if you accept the family message as your destiny. But it’s always possible to seize the permission to change,” I replied. “What does your girlfriend think of your work?”

“She thinks I’m a genius,” he said, with barely a pause for thought.

“A promising beginning,” I noted, pleased. “You chose someone who believes in you.”

I thought I heard a sigh of relief.

“You know,” Daniel continued, “when I talked with my father he was really embarrassed. His whole connection with painting and graphics was unclear to him. Finally he told me: ‘My father didn’t value his work, because his father wanted him to become the artist he himself had never been... I told him that perhaps he didn’t wish to be a painter, that he could have been happy becoming a successful graphic artist if his father had been supportive. I saw that he was as surprised as I was by that new possibility. He didn’t deny it the next day either. I think he has started his own homework now...’”



“And what about your mother?” I asked.

“At first Mom didn’t delve too deeply into the question or her answer. She dismissed me with, ‘Your father never made a living, just like your grandfather...’ ‘Like me?’ I asked her, scared. That question pushed her buttons, ‘Aren’t things going well for you?’ she asked, with renewed interest in my work. ‘They want to fire me,’ I told her. She looked at me sadly. And then, I asked her for the first time what expectations she had of me. She didn’t really know what to say. At dinner, I felt she looked at me with a different perspective.”

Daniel was moved. Our journey had brought him, as an adult, into a new encounter with his parents.

He sprawled a little more comfortably in his chair. I mused over how the ability to see one’s parents and their work through both adult and children’s eyes is one of the more useful tools on the journey towards growing up. The two views are never the same. Sometimes it is hard to decide which is the more telling. I lean toward the idea that the adult’s view is more crucial for forgiveness, while the child’s is more central in determining unconscious choices.

Daniel the child was sure that his mother, who gave up completing her engineering studies to become a housewife and gracious hostess, had sacrificed her career for him and the family. Daniel the adult could recognize that his talented mother could have finished her engineering studies had she so desired, but that she preferred being a homemaker and had found great satisfaction in that role. Daniel recalled that after his army service began studying tourism and even run a restaurant for a while. Possibly these were attempts to identify with his mother. At the same time Daniel was captivated by the world of computers. He created a software application for illustrating business cards and then created software for educational programs. Later, he joined the multimedia company where he currently worked.

“It has really worked out well for me, but...” he broke off.

“The son of the graphic artist who had not chosen communication arts became a communication arts expert ...” said I, putting it bluntly. We both



smiled.

At our next session, Daniel told me about some changes that were happening at work. A certain project he had undertaken to finish before leaving his job had been a huge success, and the head of his firm had offered him another chance. He even suggested that Daniel should think about taking on a more responsible position with greater scope, though more clearly defined. Daniel was considering the idea favorably, as it left him room for initiative and personal responsibility – which he needed, although he had not yet clearly discerned as much.

“And,” he added excitedly, “my girlfriend is pregnant. We’re expecting a son.”

Daniel was bursting with pride. I thought to myself that becoming a parent was also probably connected with the transition he had made from his child’s-eye view of his parents and the experiences he had shared with them, to seeing them from an adult perspective as people, and not simply as parents.

Daniel could now see the bigger picture. How he had been inwardly tied to his father’s profession. How his father and grandfather had felt unfulfilled. How he had been unable to accept his choice of graphic design as his own choice. How he perceived himself as a loser, in a manner that paralleled the way his father and mother saw him. And how a veto which had passed down through generations had prevented him from feeling that he could be satisfied, fulfilled, or successful.

Daniel now understood that it was not in his work that he was at an impasse but in the way he related to his work. He also understood that ignorance and misunderstanding had pushed him into wanting to change his profession, and that he had neglected addressing the essential questions involving his profession and the way he related to it.

“People who live with high expectations of themselves,” I shared with Daniel, “sometimes make do with the feeling that they haven’t chosen. Meanwhile they enjoy greater freedom. One who has not chosen is not ranked in relation to some comparative yardstick or other benchmark. He or she gets the benefit of the doubt and can go on dreaming of perfection.”



Daniel made a conscious decision to commit to success and free choice. After his son was born, he grew increasingly successful at selling multimedia services, and the list of his satisfied clients kept growing. Simultaneously, however, he still had many doubts: Am I good enough? Will I be able to maintain the momentum? The son's fear of success was juxtaposed against the pain of his "unfulfilled" and "unsuccessful" father, who so wanted his son to succeed, yet also envied him and had difficulty bestowing him with praise. Daniel's father's aspirations were, in fact, those of his own father. Given that he had never dared to take a good look at what he was all about, how could he have offered freedom of choice to his son?

Aside from this difficulty, the element of fear also exists uncomfortably alongside success. If I achieve what my father was unable to achieve, if I succeed – will I still be my father's son? If I succeed, how will I be judged in relationship to him? How will his failure look next to my success?

This brought me to thoughts of Greg, who had done well in his profession and was the successful son of an "unsuccessful" father. When yet another wave of success overtook him, Greg told me with pain: "The fact that I'm successful in my work is a daily reminder to my father of what he missed out on in life. It's terribly painful. But I'm not giving in because along with the pain is his pride in my accomplishments and my wonderful feelings of fulfillment. These are things I'm not willing to throw away!"

Towards the end of my journey together with Daniel, and only a month after his grandchild was born, Daniel's father died. Daniel had been able to spend time at his father's bedside, being close and caring for him with kindness. The father and son, for perhaps the first time in their lives, were able to talk and spend time together in friendship and reconciliation. His father was happy with his success.

I had often wondered how much the death of a beloved father – despite having lived with a feeling of having missed out – can make it easier for a child to change



direction and take a new and different path.

Daniel's bereavement made me think that perhaps a person is fortunate to be able to bid his parents farewell and separate from them while they are still alive. Daniel was able to do that. In a gradual, conscious process, Daniel gleaned wisdom from his father about what was good in him, and came to terms with what was lacking, without paying too heavy a price for this reconciliation. I thought about how lucky people are who do not have to "kill off" their parents in order to live their own lives, to be free, to have a wide range of choices without losing their parents' love.

A year later, Daniel came to see me. He was tastefully dressed, twenty-five pounds thinner and sported an excellent haircut. He said, "I came back to tell you that now I finally know that I really love what I do." His face was all lit up with his recent revelation.

"And what are you working at now?" I asked with interest.

"These days I'm doing what I really love, and I'm enjoying every moment of it. I build applications for people who don't understand communication arts and multimedia, so I get to combine my passion for my work with my desire to help people and meet their needs. The dialogue I have with people as I'm working on their applications is very important to me. Maybe that's because of the dialogue you and I had – to ask, to answer, to respond, to provide, and to contribute in a creative, colorful way. This allows for self-expression, both for me and for my clients. Does that make any sense?"

I smiled. Both of us felt a great leap forward had been made.

"It's not just that you made it, you're also helping other people to express their abilities and their feelings by helping them give birth to their ideas and recycling them as graphic design."

"I guess. I really am happy to wake up in the mornings."

I sat there thinking. I have always seen myself as a kind of midwife; someone who enables others, in the midst of confusion and ignorance, to be reborn. Only when I came to terms with what my father had missed out on was I able to be reborn myself.

"And are you still bothered if other people don't appreciate what you do?" I asked.

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“Less than I used to be,” he said, “but the truth is that now the people around me also appreciate me more.”

“And you yourself know that you’re good at what you do,” I noted.

“Definitely!”

At our last meeting, Daniel told me about his desire to go into business for himself and about realizing his dream of setting up his own multimedia company. “My company,” he said proudly, “even has a name already. Image Ltd.” As an only child who grew up almost without a father; and as an entrepreneur (he selected a typical “fatherless” career path), Daniel felt that having his own company would provide him with the right kind of incubator. This would be a new opportunity for trusting his vision. Permission had not only been seized by Daniel, but stretched and expanded.

Working with Daniel was for me a journey of seeking the path from darkness to light, from silence to speech. I felt, as he did, that what had emerged from the pain of impasse and from identifying the forbidden, were permission, fulfillment, timing, acknowledgement, and self-expression. All of this in turn had given birth to joy and satisfaction, for both Daniel and me.

As a partner in enabling permission for another person to succeed, my own permission had expanded a little, too.



Chapter Four

Know Thyself

Awareness of my identity was the gateway to a meaningful career

I have always felt that people know quite well where they are stuck. Some people at an impasse even know where they would like to go, and they sense which route they must choose to move towards self-actualization. What they lack is an understanding of precisely what is bothering them, how to put it behind them, and how to acquire tools for coping with the issues they encounter along the road to fulfillment.

When I was five years old, my only brother, Zorick, was born. For a third of his brief life he was gravely ill, and when I was six-and-a-half, he died. His death filled my parents with guilt, despair, and helplessness at their failure to save him. All this changed my place in the family, and afterwards in the world. I became an invisible observer. The child I was and the person I grew up to be – was no longer seen. In their mourning, my parents bequeathed me only half a life: the active half. The feeling half, for many years, stood honor guard over the family's bereavement.

A child's emotional niche and history in the family can be a springboard to achievement, but also an obstacle. As a child matures, he or she needs to have someone provide a kind of supervised "training program" to help overcome the pain and the obstacles scattered like stones in the field of life – in order for the child's destiny to germinate, develop, and flower.

My encounter with Nathan was such a voyage of growth. It was a journey from have-not to have; a voyage from the inner world of Nathan, born to a reality in which his existence was acknowledged and permitted only when he was absent and erased from sight, towards the experience of an existence filled with work, satisfaction, and fulfillment.



I first met Nathan soon after he had undergone vocational testing. He asked me to take a look at the results.

They were astonishing. The report placed on my desk that day unequivocally indicated: “The subject has exceptional ability in all realms of endeavor: technical, mathematical, verbal, creative, etc. If he so desires, he could excel as a top journalist, electronics engineer, or accountant.”

“This man has a rare breadth of talent,” stated the counselor who brought me the report. “He must be a top executive, right?”

I had a hard time replying. The gap between the test results and the reality of Nathan’s situation was so vast that I needed time to assimilate the information. In fact, it was almost impossible to connect the data with Nathan, who appeared lethargic and spoke in a dry, distant monotone. Perhaps it was his very alienation that drew me to him.

Later on, with Nathan poised to embark on his road to self-actualization; I realized how commonly the death of a sibling turns out to be a deciding factor in a child’s life. Often parents are blind to a child’s existence and ignore the child’s needs, feeling, or talents.

“I’ve always wanted to work in accounting,” said Nathan bluntly, and a bit awkwardly, “but I’m nowhere near that. And I don’t understand why or where I’m stuck.”

I wondered to myself why he didn’t bother to ask if that was the right profession for him; the information was lying there from the psychological assessment he had just undergone. Clearly Nathan knew that at that point it was not yet relevant.

I realized right from the outset that Nathan was trapped in the maze of his life. He was up against that great riddle. Why, despite his impressive range of talents and the fact that he recognized his life direction quite clearly, had Nathan worked for all those years as a junior technician in a small refrigeration company?

There was no doubt that Nathan was going to be a professional challenge for me. Yet beyond that, he seemed like a small island of sadness. I wanted to rescue him from his private prison, but I had no idea how to go about it.

Our first session resembled shots fired in desperation through a fog. I fired

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off volley after volley at what appeared to be an impenetrable thicket, hoping that somehow I would connect and create an opening. At the beginning I asked Nathan routine questions: family status, age, type of employment, education, and the other getting-acquainted questions that frame the beginning of a long, drawn-out quest. I asked, and he answered. Pale and listless, Nathan's eyes remained vacant and his shoulders slumped.

"My wife sent me," he eventually told me.

I kept still, focused on hearing that voice breaking through.

"I don't know exactly why I came to you," he continued. "Maybe I came to get counseling or direction. Truthfully, I don't have the slightest idea what I'm going to be when I grow up... and I've been grown up already for so many years," he said, with a forlorn, resigned look in his eyes.

"What do you do?" I asked.

"I'm a technician," he answered immediately.

"A good one?"

"Yes, but so what?" he added belligerently, as if the words were being torn from his mouth. "I've never liked to study!"

Those appeared to be Nathan's first words to me uttered on his own initiative.

"So how do you learn?" I asked, hoping to hear another voice from among the ruins of his wishes and desires.

I tried to relate to him with a series of typical psychotherapist's questions. What kind of a reader is he? What sort of breaks does he take? What does he do with his eyes? How fast does he read? Does he make spelling mistakes, and if so, of what nature? What kind of temperament does he have?

We both got bored, however, and were unable to generate any momentum. Nathan slumped further and further down. The maze seemed more complicated than ever.

And then, suddenly, Nathan said: "Something inside me puts me off."

I looked at him. Suddenly I recognized, in the slumped shoulders and the vacant eyes, the type of person who had been forbidden to succeed.

I looked at Nathan again and knew that I had discovered the solitary confinement in which he was imprisoned. Now I would have to find the key to

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free him. I wanted to learn something about the background to this imprisonment. From my experience, it is often the case that this kind of a prison sentence is connected to family patterns of free choice.

“Tell me, Nathan,” I went on conventionally, “what did your parents do? Were they satisfied with their work? How good was your relationship with them?”

Nathan smiled in embarrassment and scratched his head. “My father was a blue-collar worker all his life,” he said. “He always used to tell us that work was work, leisure was leisure, and that they shouldn’t be confused with one another. ‘You don’t go to work to enjoy yourself,’ he used to say. The truth is that I had a problem with my father. Until I was grown up, I had no relationship with him at all. He was a man with no aspirations – stubborn, indifferent – and highly skilled with his hands.”

“Okay, so what did you two do together?” I prodded him.

Despite everything, I believed in the ability of fathers and sons to communicate along various channels. Nathan’s reply surprised me: “We played soccer together. Every Saturday. We used to play on a little field behind our old house.”

I breathed easier. I sensed that I had succeeded, if only for a moment, in making contact with the source of Nathan’s vitality.

“And what about your father’s work?” I pressed on.

“My father wasn’t much of a success at work.”

“And your mother?”

“My mother was a cleaning lady. She was a warm, friendly person.”

“Who do you take after?” I asked.

“To some extent, I’m like my mother – I’m a worrier, and I want to help, like her.”

I smiled. There was a note of success in the way Nathan spoke. He talked of his mother warmly and with pride, and the metaphorical dungeon was suddenly illuminated with a flash of light.

The riddle was not yet completely solved, but parts of it were becoming clearer. My experience inclined me to press on. I knew that we were approaching the goal. I pursued a line of questioning about his parents’

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parents and we discovered that the psycho-genetics, although complicated, were not an obstacle. Something else was clanking around the cell – something murky, heavy and threatening, some bond that had hold of Nathan. He did not have enough strength to break those heavy iron chains by himself.

I tried to break in by referring to his married life and asked him about his wife.

“My wife?” he repeated, his eyes lighting up for a moment. “My wife has always urged me to study – workshops, seminars, new projects – everything. But somehow, it hasn’t taken me anywhere.”

Nathan’s expression once again became indifferent.

“What does your wife do?” I asked, moving on with my interrogation.

“Carol’s a dental technician, very successful, and she’s a very optimistic person.”

“What about your siblings?” I asked. I wanted to become familiar with a broader cross-section of his vocational family tree. Moreover, I knew that there were only so many avenues of inquiry left to me. My brain was working feverishly as I tried to puzzle it out.

Nathan didn’t understand my distress. “There are three of us...” he began, “though actually, I had an older brother who died when he was a year old. At the time, I wasn’t on the scene yet... I came into the picture only after his death.”

The fact that it was so important to him to be precise about the timing of his own conception was, for me, a green light.

I asked him to tell me a little more about it. “My brother Mickey died because the doctors made a mistake. He was a year old. He had appendicitis and there were complications. I never asked about the details,” he said. “Because of him I guess I’m special,” he added in a near whisper. “I think I came into the world, well, sort of to take his place.”

Nathan didn’t know how right he was. Not infrequently, parents who lose a child tend to have a “replacement” baby to fill the space left by the loss. Often, this replacement child does not have, indeed must not have, a real space of his own in the world. Serving as the stand-in is his designated role. The hopes his parents had nurtured for his sibling are now passed onto the tender



shoulders of the replacement child. Sometimes the demands are so strenuous that the replacement child relinquishes the impossible mission in advance. When we factor in this sort of psychogenetic inheritance of a failed struggle for existence, clearly such a person needs tremendous powers to attain any forward movement at all.

Such children are born into immediate distress. They sense the demand that they become two, or even three, individuals. Sadness and depression mark the loss of the dead sibling, while the living child's very existence compensates for the dead child's absence. As another patient of mine, who had also lost a sibling in childhood, once said, "I am a walking memorial." Still another bereaved brother once told me, "I am a living grave."

Nathan, in fact, had had an additional heavy burden to bear. "A year after me my brother Max was born," he related. "Max always wanted what I had, and I always gave it to him. I always deferred to him."

"Why did you? Did you ever think about that?" I asked, mainly to hear him give voice to the unfairness of it.

"Because of my mother. My mother was so sad, and all I wanted was for her to be happy, I wanted her not to worry so much."

"Your mother loved you."

"I was a special child. Only now talking with you, I'm beginning to figure out that I filled the place of two sons – the living one and the dead one."

"In my experience," I told him, "you aren't the only one to respond in this way. You must remember that it's impossible to live for two – it's hard to be satisfied with what you do, however great it is, if the expectations are doubled. A child who is expected to fill the role of his dead brother is doomed to failure: no matter what he does, he will never be able to fulfill people's hopes."

I explained to Nathan that people in this situation tend towards inaction, reaching conclusions like "I don't know what I want to be when I grow up" or "I have to do something special that no one else has ever done" or "I have to do something especially wonderful and anything less will be a disappointment."

Nathan seemed embarrassed. "That's exactly how I feel," he said. "I want to do something special. Maybe for my mother more than for my dead brother. She always did everything for me, but I couldn't pay her back. I couldn't. I even tried to bring my dead brother to life. Once I asked her to call me Mickey



and she cried. I asked her to be happy about what I said, and she was sad and said nothing. Finally, I guess I chose to kill off the living child – myself.”

“That’s where the ‘giving up’ comes in,” I said in agreement. “Renouncing need, forgoing the search, and especially renouncing actualization – which is doomed in advance to be inadequate, and maybe impossible.”

“You know what? I’ve never thought about it in that way,” he said, sitting up straighter. “It’s not easy to see things from the inside. I... I’ve hardly talked at all in my life. With my father, never. I always kept quiet. With my mother, most of our relationship didn’t involve words. All she had to do was look at me, and I’d do whatever she wanted, out of love.”

I sensed that it was still too early to deal with the inevitable anger and frustration, too soon to go into the burden of the legacy that had been laid on Nathan.

“After me, two more brothers were born,” he continued. “None of us is really educated. I’m sure that all three of us could at least have finished university.”

“Nathan, comforter of the bereaved. You still don’t know what you can achieve. In spite of the fact that, at our first session, you hinted that you do know the field you’d choose, for self-actualization....”

“Evidently,” he said, and stopped.

“Even before you came to me,” I emphasized, “you pretty much knew what you wanted to do. It seems that your problem is in trying to define what you want for yourself, not for your mother or your dead brother.”

I saw clearly that Nathan, like many other people who come to me for counseling, knew quite well his own worth and what he wanted. For such people psychological testing and vocational evaluation merely serve as confirmation.

Children also know what they want. Nathan’s desires were buried deep inside him. He knew his direction and had the necessary spark for adequate action. I was worried that the existence of that spark might be in danger.

A month passed. Nathan thought things over and continued to digest them. “When I was an adolescent, I used to write,” he recalled. “I wrote about all sorts of things. My thoughts, experiences, ideas that came to me. I put it all in a drawer. Now, I don’t write, and I don’t have any other kind of outlet either.

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Nothing.”

“Nothing?”

“Well, not really. I knew that a confrontation with my mother would be hard for her, not for me. I can’t do that to her,” said Nathan, almost to himself.

Nathan was born to a fragile mother and, thus, that is how he perceived her as a woman, too. He could not take the risk of losing her. He could not allow himself to accuse her or be angry with her for having forced him to bear the burden of his dead brother.

When a small child dies, the parent carries a tremendous amount of guilt and anger. These feelings connect with a certain rage at oneself for daring to try to be a good parent to a living child. After the failure to parent the child who died, how can one be happy about the child who’s alive? How can one be happy at all?

The child who serves as a replacement imbibes these feelings with his mother’s milk. His mother, in fact, conveys a dangerously mixed message. Anything is possible, and nothing is possible. Be both dead and alive. In Nathan’s terms, it went like this: “If I wrote, they would expect me to be, at the very least, a Wordsworth or a Shakespeare, and at the same time they would expect me to be incapable of writing anything at all. I wrote poems that impressed people, but I stopped pretty quickly,” he noted candidly. “I just gave it up. That’s exactly the old pain that’s been chasing me ever since. I’m dying to write, and it never happens. Giving it up is killing me.”

“What else have you given up?” I asked.

Nathan surprised me further. “You won’t believe this, but I was the school’s champion runner. After I took first prize I stopped running.”

We were back to the fear of success and the guilt feelings that success engenders.

“I stopped painting after I won a prize for one of my drawings when I was fifteen,” I told him. “I was petrified by success. It took me almost another forty years to come back to it... and to start all over again.”

Three forces can prevent us from performing: the will to achieve, the fear of failure, and the fear of success. The first two are understandable, the third less so. It is connected with having (or not having) permission to actualize deep yearnings. The price of our success can be exacting. Our relationships

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with the people we love and depend on can sometimes be damaged by their reaction to our success. If happiness at Nathan's success, for example, evokes his mother's sadness and guilt in relation to the lost son and the lost brother, then it is preferable to be without such happiness...

I very much wanted to connect with that spark of urgency in Nathan, to the fact that he was once a winner. I suggested that he continued his journey and moved forward.

Gradually Nathan and I learned more about him. We learned that he was gifted, stubborn, sad, and blocked, a person who perseveres out of habit, but never really commits. We also uncovered colossal anger, and a deep longing to simply be an ordinary child, one who is not expected to be a champion athlete, a Shakespeare, and simultaneously a vocational failure, but a child whose mother sees him as he is. We focused mainly on two special components of his personality. His determination and his depth of character, which he had never allowed himself to recognize. It appeared as if Nathan had chosen to become acquainted with only part of himself. Just as his mother related to him by seeing him as a reflection of his dead brother, so did Nathan stash away parts of his personality and his feelings, never learning to acknowledge or value them. Still, deep down, he knew they were there.

It was actually his father, who though unable to talk with him, gave him permission – through their shared soccer games – to exist. This was obviously important, limited though it was. Yet Nathan's father did not bequeath him a direction in life any more than his mother had.

Nathan's emotional life was a reflection of his extended identity. He felt that only his absence made his existence felt. When he was present and dared to show signs of life, he never got any real feedback. Alive, Nathan was ignored. There was simply too much guilt.

I thought of my dead brother. It was he who connected me with Nathan. After my brother's death, my mother took to her bed, covering herself up in depression and despair. I was forgotten. After about a year, when she had no more strength left, the doctor told her, "You have a living daughter who needs you. If you don't take care of her again, she will die, too."

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When I was older, my mother told me that she had been so frightened by what he said that she chose to live again. Nonetheless, I too, had to invest years of work on myself and my family in order to build a good life with joy and creativity and not be satisfied merely with the fact of my sheer existence. Somehow, with their last remaining strength and with great courage, my parents were able to reach out and push me ahead to a safer shore.

During my journey with Nathan, I asked myself more than once whether mine was the hand that was pushing Nathan toward that shore. But it wasn't. I only helped him find it. It was his wife Carol who was the warrior. She set the direction and was there for him to lean on. I sensed that behind the phrase "my wife sent me" was great power, not weakness. These were the words that expressed Nathan's strength. For years Carol had been his engine. She was the woman who permitted him to exist and who bequeathed him life.

After Carol was openly recruited for the journey, Nathan became stronger, "My wife believes in me and she's no fool," he told me, and later on he said: "You are always asking me what I would like to be. I actually have known for a long time."

"Both of us know that you know," I replied confidently. What we did not yet know was what had to be released in order to fulfill his desires. I asked Nathan to try to describe what he wanted.

"I want to begin living life," he said with conviction. "I want to study accounting. Accounting is connected with bringing order to commerce and finance. What you get and what you give and what remains..."

The force of his clarity shocked both of us. So banal, so simple.

"Now comes the question: How are you, Nathan, going to do that," I said. It was clear to me that he also knew what path he needed to choose to reach his goal. Another thing was clear to me, and apparently to him as well. In the technical field in which he was then employed, the same field that had been his father's and in which his father had failed, Nathan could not cope with success.

"In accounting, I will succeed," he responded.

In the evaluation Nathan had undergone, his accounting talent had been conspicuous, as had his need to bring order to things and put them in suitable

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frameworks and possibly advise people how to put their own accounts in order. Evidently, accounting was the field in which he could provide financial counseling and enjoy doing so.

Nathan raised a thumb skyward: “Not a mere tax adviser but an accountant. Writing as a hobby will be an expression of my soul.”

I leaned back and sighed in relief. The rescue squad’s tough mission was about to conclude. The freed party was present and accounted for. Now he would have to shake off all that dust, change his clothes, and go out and rehabilitate his vocational life. Accounting would be an excellent solution. We both clearly saw that Nathan would perform better as a self-employed professional than as an employee. I suggested that he not invest too much energy in integrating himself into a big corporation. “Going it alone will shorten the way for you,” I recommended.

These things are true for many people for whom their families never served as functionally constructive systems for promoting their progress, often requiring them to blaze their own trails to success. These people do well as self-employed professionals, where they and they alone are responsible for their fate.



Chapter Eleven

I Know what my Dream is but not how to Reach it

Seeking the job that enables fulfillment

At the age of thirty-two, my husband and I became business partners when we established the Adam Institute, an Institute for Applied Psychology. Nothing in the course of my life up to that point had suggested that I wanted to or ever would be the owner of a business, even though it was crystal clear that working for someone else was not for me.

The entrepreneurs that I have counseled and with whom I have shared journeys of discovery have taught me to view the process differently. Over the years I have learned that people, who grow up in family environments with chaotic, non-authoritative parenting, often have trouble working in a regulated system and tend to build “systems” of their own. People who come from families with clear levels of authority and well-defined rules tend to join “clear-cut” organizations and gravitate to positions that correspond to roles they had played within their families.

When I was nine years old my parents wanted to buy a new apartment. Before signing the contract they asked me to have a look at it. They explained how moving to a new dwelling involved me, too, and that I had a one-third share in the decision. I took their proposal very seriously and walked around the apartment, surveying it carefully. Within a few minutes I returned to my parents and asked them three questions: Did this apartment cost more than the one we already had? Why was it more suitable than the old one? What were they looking for in the new apartment?

My parents responded that both apartments cost approximately the same.



After some unpersuasive dialogue and argument, they agreed that in fact they were not really sure why the new apartment was more suitable, and that actually it was not what they were really looking for. After I had listened to all this with due seriousness, I told them, “The deal is no good.” My parents were astounded at this authoritative pronouncement, and my father pounced on me, “Who gave you the right to decide that, young lady? You’re out of line!” Although I knew my suggestion was going to be adopted, the hurt and confusion I felt remained with me for a long time.

For years afterward I was afraid to make important decisions.

I came to understand that it’s not enough to be born or grow up in an atmosphere of entrepreneurship. Beyond being endowed with the appropriate personal profile and an inner enterprising quality, the would-be entrepreneur has to master many skills. But these can most definitely be learned.

My impression is that the ranking of people in various organizations tends to correlate with a person’s birth-order rank and with the quality of his or her sibling relationships. Professional literature documents this phenomenon exhaustively. In his book *Born to Rebel* (1997), Frank Sulloway details hundreds of biographical sketches about people in politics, the arts, the sciences, and the clergy. In all cases he found that firstborn children identify with authority while younger siblings rebel against it. He presents findings from thousands of cases showing the links between birth order and family dynamics, management style, and creative endeavor in general.

Sulloway addresses additional important variables linked with choice of organizational framework and an individual’s niche within it – how authoritarian the father was, how rigid the system is, how that person experiences management, how highly the individual respects management and vice versa. All these factors influence not only work style but also the organizations a person chooses to join or to build, and their satisfaction in belonging to them.

Most entrepreneurial activity is built around an entrepreneur’s personality and not the other way around. The people around them do not always understand just what they are striving for. They themselves know very well where they are going, even if their road traverses complicated and unknown

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territory. Entrepreneurs often fuse different fields or professions to suit their own needs.

My journey with a businessman named André was training for me in identifying the skills entrepreneurs require and in recognizing the pitfalls they encounter along the way. When I first met him I didn't know precisely how to pinpoint the problem. André was then in his forties. He had an unusual combination of qualities that should have paved his way along the fast track and brought him rapidly to the top. He had a pleasant, disarming appearance and a well-honed sense of marketing communications. He had extensive knowledge in the field of pharmaceuticals and a prophetic sense of where the global pharmaceuticals market was headed. A classic entrepreneur, he constantly came up with original solutions fusing market demands with innovative products.

Though André ought to have been assured of success, in practice he went through one failure after another. In the local pharmaceutical industry he had a notorious reputation. He would devise some outstanding new idea and move quickly to implementation but, at some unclear point later in the development process, production would somehow crash. The enterprise would quickly go under; the business would go into receivership, then the rights to his innovative product would be sold to some other smart entrepreneur who would reap the rewards of André's innovation and make a financial killing.

Poised on the verge of throwing in the towel, André somehow mustered the strength necessary to ask for professional guidance.

"I'm at the end of my tether," he said at the start of our first session. "I've been setting up great business ventures for over twenty years, implementing infrastructure and logistics, recruiting teams and first-round financing, working night and day – and then, for some reason I can't figure out – everything collapses."

"And why did you come here now, at this particular point?" I asked. There is always special importance and timing attached to the circumstances that cause someone to request help.

"I came because I've lost hope. I felt that if I didn't go for professional counseling, I would simply die."



I looked at him. I felt as if I were gazing at the merest flicker of a candle that was on the verge of being extinguished.

André gazed at me vacantly, and I thought about the immense variety of talents an entrepreneur needs on the difficult road to success. Some of the skills required – curiosity, know-how, a clear vision, financial acumen, an ability to exploit business opportunities – are obvious. The stumbling block for someone with the typical entrepreneur’s wealth of talents is generally rooted in some hidden corner of their emotional world. This emotional block can cause the whole growth process to be derailed, almost as if some fragile greenhouse flower were deprived of the special condition necessary to bloom.

“In my opinion,” I told André, “your awareness of your repeated failures at several key crossroads hold the key to change. Once you have identified these, you’ll be able to transform any situation and control it.”

I advised André to think like a farmer who, having found a diseased plant, takes a good look at the roots. André knew there was a problem, and now he needed to explore what was going on at root level. What happened to him time after time whenever success was just around the next corner?

André was relieved to know that he had a choice and that there were in fact tools that could help him diagnose the problem and facilitate its prompt resolution. When he left that day, I caught a glimmer of hope in his eyes.

At our next meeting André told me of his happy childhood in Morocco.

“My father had a successful leather-processing factory,” he recalled smiling. “He was full of original ideas and incredibly industrious. He knew how to assess market needs, and was always a little ahead of the competition. We lacked for nothing at home. Although I was only three at the time, I understood that the big leather workshop next to the textile market was what provided my food and all the toys and nice clothes I had. Observing my father taught me in the most natural way how to run a business, how to identify market needs and how to negotiate. And my father taught me how to relate to workers and to know my way around the business community. I was immensely proud of him.”

The big crisis came at the beginning of the fifties. André and his family were part of a massive wave of emigration that found themselves torn from their

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palatial marble villa in Casablanca and dumped in a humble tent in a transit camp for new immigrants in Israel. “This,” reminisced André sadly, “was something my father found impossible to cope with. Overnight he turned into a shadow of his former self. In Morocco, everything he touched had turned to gold, while in his new home everything he tried to do ended up in total failure. Still, he wasn’t one to give in easily. After he’d recovered somewhat from the trauma of the transition, and mastered a new language, he gathered up the meager savings he’d been able to spirit out of Morocco, enlisted a partner, and set up a business that completely bombed. He was in shock.

“Nonetheless,” André continued, “he wasn’t completely beaten. Since he had no money left, he tried to find work as a manager in a leather enterprise, but that didn’t work out well either. My father wasn’t cut out to be an employee. Entrepreneurship is a personality, not a profession. I, who was six at the time, understood that he was almost fading away right in front of us. To save him, my mother sold all her valuable jewelry and precious family heirlooms. She gave the money to my father and told him to go start a new business for the family.”

“And did he succeed with that?” I asked, nearly whispering.

“It was almost too late, but he gathered up the strength and managed to open a new factory. However, after a few months we realized that the jewelry so close to my mother’s heart was never coming back to us. My father had wonderful ideas and he knew the leather business like I know myself, but he didn’t know how to run a factory in this new business environment. My father was connected to his plant like someone kept alive by intravenous feeding; as the business declined, so did he. In the end, the business went bankrupt, and a few months later my father had a massive heart attack and died en route to the hospital. If you ask me, he simply died of a broken heart.”

André, a little ten-year-old entrepreneur by nature, and orphaned only a week, now made himself a vow. “I saw the empty refrigerator at home, my mother crying, her hands devoid of her diamond rings, and the picture of my father on the sideboard. I decided that my family would never go hungry and I swore to continue my father’s legacy.”

“You took on some tough goals forged in great pain,” I remarked.

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André smiled sadly, and looked at me with an expression of bitter irony. “When I grew up,” he said, “I chose pharmaceuticals which is a field involving chemistry and chemical substances. Pharmaceuticals have a lot of scope and good money can be made; if you’re lucky enough to have one of your drugs succeed in the global market, you can make a fortune. I teamed up with the best pharmaceutical people in the country and created a network of connections. Yet somehow, somewhere, I always fail.”

A little warning bell began to ring somewhere in my head and its sound was becoming familiar.

In subsequent sessions we figured out that André had succumbed to a classic and well-known trap that causes the downfall of many outstanding entrepreneurs – a problem in making the transition from the entrepreneurial phase of a start-up to the more institutional phase of an established business. The institutionalization stage demands new and different skills appropriate for managing and building a business. André was not able to cope successfully with this. He could not let go of the reins and delegate someone with the requisite management skills and expertise. Being an orphan had petrified him in survival mode; he was simply unable to move into institutionalization mode.

Many entrepreneurs are easily confused when it comes to the extent of their skills. They wrongly assume that their ability to invent an outstandingly original product and put it on the market implies an ability to manage the process.

“The business is my baby,” many entrepreneurs tend to say with pride. “Who can know an infant’s needs better than its mother?” They tend to forget that the ability to give birth to a baby doesn’t guarantee parenting skills – even when a young mother is assisted by caregivers, parents, or older siblings.

Managing a business is a profession at which very few entrepreneurs excel, nor are many interested in doing so. However, at the same time, they find it hard to relinquish control over the business by transferring its management to a professional. They also find it difficult to commit themselves to the sort of personal development process that would teach them how to assume ownership of the business while maintaining clear distinction between ownership and day-to-day management.

Most entrepreneurs I’ve known have fallen into one of two categories – born



entrepreneurs, who are generally offspring of entrepreneurs – and those who take on the role owing to specific circumstances in their lives. Both types are the kind of people who, at least in the context of their work, aspire to “be their own father or boss.” They want to run the business themselves. They don’t merely own the business, they become the business.

That, generally, is the story of their lives. They are unprepared, unwilling, and sometimes unable to work in a situation where someone has managerial authority over them. Some are able to learn, through great effort and investment in the process, how to manage their business. Others hire a professional manager and move on as successful entrepreneurs. All the rest simply fail – they cannot manage themselves, they won’t let anyone else manage them or their business, and they are not able to work for anyone else.

It is almost impossible to tame entrepreneurs and turn them into successful employees. It is preferable for the entrepreneur to undertake a journey of personal development and learn self-management, or else install a manager in his place and learn to direct his energy as owner into nurturing the manager he has hired. To be a good owner also requires a learning process.

André was an entrepreneur who grew up without a father. Sitting there across from him I thought about my father, who was orphaned in infancy. All his life he had worked for someone else. His attitude to authority was a fatal combination of pain, rage, covert rebellion, and fear. He needed to be told what to do by someone in authority, yet was unable to come to terms with the essential nature of authority.

On the experiential level, I thought of how my own father had abdicated the authoritarian role that he should have played for me. Just like André I taught myself to take the initiative and manage my own life, and in the most natural way I constructed a work environment for myself wherein I functioned as my own parent and boss. Nonetheless, since I had no inner model of the authoritative parent, I left a lot to be desired as a manager. My breakthrough came only at the end of a long process, when I was finally able to see that just as an infant needs a skilled caregiver with suitable training, my own company required a professional manager.

Making that leap required a tremendous effort of inward development on my
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part. Beyond acknowledging my inability to manage, I needed to transform our Mom & Pop Company into an organization, enable a professional to run it successfully, and build my role as owner.

This is what led me to a further personal breakthrough. The moment that the weight of management was lifted from my shoulders, I was able to turn to more natural skills in areas where I was far more productive. The entire process required a kind of incubation period and a readiness to move on to new activities.

André reached impasse because he had trouble distinguishing between his abilities and his limitations as an entrepreneur.

Aside from his failed management attempts, André did not yet have a fully developed capacity for mature entrepreneurship that encompassed an ability to recruit assistance from others and take full responsibility for his own challenges.

Although he had twenty years of botched entrepreneurship behind him, André did not find it easy to understand that, at this point, he needed to stop trying to build new business ventures. He needed first of all to build himself up. Coming up with great ideas was not a problem; André was always bursting with inspiring ideas. His problem was that he wanted to implement them himself!

After André had more accurately defined his goals for self-actualization, he needed to focus on the learning process he was about to undertake, the gist of which would be to develop his ability to be successful at a business he chose to pursue. He understood that he needed to expand his emotional range and acquire new skills while learning how to build stronger organizational and business infrastructures. Now he would have to define goals and timetables. He would also need to prioritize outcomes and decide which routes to follow in achieving them.

By analyzing his past failures, André realized that he lacked the skills for building an organizational-family structure to nurture goals, products, and work teams and unify them within a structure reflecting professionalism and a set of relevant values.

“It’s like building a family,” André said at one point, when he had lost his

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way and profitability was down. “Step by step, with love, and constant communication. And mainly, I have to take complete parental responsibility for my business, not just for having invented it.”

The learning process took five years. André learned to run his business, and when he became more successful he learned how to delegate work to the professional managers working under him. Chiefly he learned how to parent himself responsibly, and succeeded in overcoming the circumstances of his childhood events.

As already noted, the family is the first organization we encounter. The character of this organization, our place in it vis-à-vis our parents, siblings, and grandparents – and sometimes even aunts and uncles – is likely to influence the choice of organizations in which we choose to work in the future. That initial organizational conception and the experiences involving our place in the family are the foundation of the way we relate as mature adults to our work environment. An organizational climate, like a family climate, has a special “aroma.” This aroma can become either magnetically attractive for us, or a guaranteed recipe for failure.

Grace came to me for vocational counseling in the context of her disability. Even though Grace had been struck with a degenerative muscle disease, she was the kind of person who refused to accept or even acknowledge her limitations.

Most of the time Grace didn’t stop long enough to catch her breath. Her disability and the fact that she could move only by using a wheelchair didn’t prevent her from being in a constant state of hyperactivity. She talked rapidly, and periodically looked at her watch. It was obvious to me that Grace was an entrepreneur to her very fingertips.

At sixteen, together with a friend, she had set up a sandwich-making business that she later sold at a substantial profit. While others her age were spending the bulk of their free time going out and having fun, Grace set up her next business, a convenience store that turned into a neighborhood fixture and was constantly packed with customers. She never rested and was

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completely devoted to the business. She had no concept of time. “I lost myself fairly quickly,” she told me. “I was so busy, I ceased to exist. I was drunk with success and high on achievement.”

The turning point came when she was twenty-seven. She began suffering unexplained pain and weakness. The doctors found that her muscles were highly atrophied. Grace called it “an electric short circuit due to system overload.” For a brief period she became depressed but in due time fell back into her regular routine. She preferred to ignore her illness. She was still able to work for two or three days nonstop, paying little attention to efficiency or to results, always racing on ahead, spinning the wheels of her sporty wheelchair. When she eventually weakened, she came to me for advice about adjusting to this new reality. We both laughed. We knew this wasn’t a matter of merely adjusting; it was clear that we were going to be dealing with her workaholic nature.

Grace was a classic case of the entrepreneur without borders. Typically, people like her use up all their energy reserves in a relatively short period of time until they collapse. They get stuck because they are incapable of setting limits for themselves and are often unable to be parented even by a therapist. Generally, they do not set exact timetables for work and rest, for home or office. Most set ever-changing goals or objectives and don’t pay enough attention to their working conditions and their effectiveness. They see only one thing – the next peak to be conquered. Mountaineers of this type know that they have, for one brief moment, conquered a worthy summit, and cannot rest until they have conquered the next one, and the next one and the next one.

Perhaps because Grace could not stop, we had a problem identifying alternative objectives. We knew that only a change in her entrepreneurial style was likely to help her. We needed to look at whether she would be able to accept the message her body was sending her and do something about her addiction to work.

Grace sensed that she wasn’t capable of undergoing such a process. “I’m already a total loss. Why should I waste the time?” she said, at our final meeting. “I can’t behave in any other way, I can’t start changing now. I’ve gone too far. It’s too painful, and I’m totally exhausted.”

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“So what will happen?” I asked anxiously.

“I’ll keep running till I drop – till I’m completely dried up.”

Grace was unable to tame her entrepreneurial spirit and commit to a painful rehabilitation process that would wean her off her work addiction. She let the muscular deterioration serve as brakes that gradually brought her impossible, crazy rat race of a life to a cruel halt.

Indeed, weaning oneself from an addiction can be a lonely and terrifying business. As a professional, I had to respect her choices, however sad it made me feel.

Along with born entrepreneurs, there are people who are not cut out to be entrepreneurs, yet find themselves on that path for the wrong reasons. As difficult as it may be, such people, must become conscious of their poor choices and change their entrepreneurial role, which is completely wrong for them.

Sammy came to me for counseling when he was thirty-eight. A self-employed man, he had started all kinds of businesses and owned several small factories, mainly in printing and publishing – none of which were successful.

“I have the feeling that maybe I never really wanted to be self-employed,” replied Sammy hesitantly to my question about why success had eluded him.

His brow was furrowed with wrinkles as he thought about what he’d said.

“Deep down I guess I’ve always wanted stability, yet I was afraid of my desire to be a salaried employee, to be part of a system. I don’t know why I’ve never been able to fit in as an employee, nor as a businessman. I’ve failed repeatedly. Small time failures. I made a living. But that’s about it.”

Sammy was the son of Holocaust survivors whose lives’ had been saved by their own efforts. After the war they were both employed: his mother as a bookkeeper and his father as a clerk. Their dream for their son was of something different. They wanted him to be a gutsy entrepreneur or a daring businessman. They may have made an unconscious connection between vocational initiative and the survival initiatives that saw them safely through the Holocaust. They mistook entrepreneurship as a sure way of making life safe for their son and providing him with the tools to survive any obstacles.

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“And do you have that?” I asked him.

“I’m afraid not,” he replied, immediately adding, “That’s it. I said it. And you know what? That’s the first time I’ve admitted it out loud!”

His face softened; he looked happier.

Sammy, unfit for entrepreneurship, had been stifled the wrong way around so that his natural need to be an employee had been repressed.

Deep down, he had always known that he was not a born entrepreneur. At the same time, to confess that was almost like a death sentence for his career, and he’d been struggling against it for years. Aside from that, he was afraid of disappointing his mother and father. “It hurt me, but I accepted their almost unspoken message,” said Sammy, with pain. “Now I feel I can choose what suits me best. Now I can finally break through the walls of the concentration camp.”

With this revelation, things seemed simpler and easier to Sammy. He closed his small businesses and found work as a salesperson in a young company that appreciated his experience. He now understood that he belonged to that group of people who need structure, and who are happiest as part of a team. As an employee, Sammy felt he had a family; he felt at home.

“Being on my own,” he concluded, summing up the brief process we’d undergone together, “battling it out with the authorities and the bureaucrats, the income tax guys; I couldn’t handle that stuff.”

Once Sammy identified the environment that suited him, he was able to make a choice.

Many people have very similar feelings to Sammy’s regarding affiliation with a large system versus joining a small one. Some people feel lost in a large organization and prefer to develop and create within a narrower framework. These folks need an organization where personal attention and intimacy exist. Other people derive tremendous strength from belonging to a large organization. They are proud to be part of a large corporation and do not seek to rub shoulders intimately with their colleagues.

Sammy came from an “orderly” family where the hierarchy was clear and the style of parenting and family life provided security and defense against the outside world. He felt safe and energized within a small organization.

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What's important is to become conscious of one's entrepreneurial needs and identify the kind of organizational frame wherein one functions best. Although, entrepreneurship is an existential need for some people, it is critical to pay attention to one's inner needs. Once a diagnosis had been clearly defined, the rest of the journey becomes easy.



Appendix: How to Read my Roadmap

The Journey beyond Impasse

On various types of vocational impasse and the journey beyond them

At different stages of our lives, many of us may encounter varying degrees of dissatisfaction with our position in life, while feeling clueless about what to do about it. If that description fits you then the first question to consider should always be: If you had no limitations whatsoever to worry about, what would you choose to do? If no obstacles, real or imagined, were placed in your way, what would you dream of accomplishing?

An honest answer to these questions will enable you to take a look at what you would really like to do with your life. Once you rid yourself of pretense, fear, and lack of faith, you will be able to see your real objectives. Furthermore, you will be able to identify what you consider to be your limiting circumstances. These insights are the raw material for the preparatory work of what needs to be changed. Certain elements in your life that you believed to be ongoing, may turn out not to be. You may also uncover fears or expectations that may have been holding you back. New ideas may surface, directly or indirectly, for example when you say things like, "I love philosophy, but being in high-tech – now that's a good profession."

Not every high-tech professional makes money and not every philosopher is poor. It is the extent of the match between the individual and his/her work that is the determining factor. The more attention you are able to pay to your core needs, the more success you'll have. That is the key to being productive and creative in a fluid, competitive market where a rapid and precise response to changing needs is required.

Generally people know deep down what they really want to do, and thus a person who creates an accommodating environment with a supportive



network promotes the ability to develop and create a more focused vocational choice.

Impasse is an evolutionary part of our growth and development as a human being. Vocational impasse is not necessarily a symbol of failure. It can be an opportunity to stop and listen to our inner voice and needs while helping us to recognize crucial patterns of behavior. Being aware of and identifying repetitive patterns may help us to understand what brought us to burnout and what may lead us to new growth. Impasse is an end and a beginning – often painful, confusing and frustrating. However if we face up to it – welcome it and deal with it – it will only leave us enriched.

“I’ll never forget,” related Fred, a veteran reporter at a leading daily newspaper, “how I used to lie on the grass, looking at the clouds and make up stories. I would lie there like that for hours. In the intervening years, nothing has really changed. I’m still dealing with stories, only now I put them in writing and enjoy every moment. The pleasure hasn’t changed in all these years, nor has my profession. But it took me a long time to recognize that this was my choice. Before that, I was always broke and always busy looking for different ways to make a living...”

From my experience, I have noticed that somewhere between the ages of four and six a turning point occurs. At this stage, children begin asking questions about their gender, about whom they resemble, and about what they want to do when they grow up. At that age, however children talk in generalized stereotypes regarding professions: boys want to be policemen, astronauts, or sportsmen, while girls want to be actresses, models, or singers – or both tend to quote their parents’ professions. Still, by observing the array of activities a child prefers and enjoys doing – for example, whether it’s telling stories, assembling games, bossing/leading other children – we can equip a child to make better choices, even at an early age. In the process of working on their careers, adults I have counseled, have recalled that at the age of five or so they already knew what they wanted to do, yet most of them didn’t think it was possible, because they were told ‘that’s not a decent profession’.

Fred, as noted, personifies a person who from a young age had the permission to follow his heart’s desire. Creating worlds and stories by gazing

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at the clouds was actually a form of expression, and many years later it became his way of life. Fred derived great pleasure from his right to individual expression, and his parents respected this. His first “articles” were in fact written at the age of five. Fred was practicing the skills and techniques of creative expression while lying on the grass and playing with words. Twenty years down the road the tools had changed, but the same creative imagination was still serving him well. It took Fred a while to understand that the stories and his journalism were the same thing. It was only years after working as a journalist that he was retroactively able to “give himself permission” to integrate his hobby with his career and enjoy it.

DEFINING YOUR VOCATIONAL IMPASSE

A. WHY AM I STUCK?

B. WHERE AM I STUCK?

C. HOW CAN I MOVE ON?

A. WHY AM I STUCK?

Ten Categories of Vocational Impasse

The following ten categories of vocational impasse are based on experience drawn from observation of my patients’ journeys. It is important to note that further categories do exist, but I have chosen the following categories as the basic examples for a starting point.

1. I am “forbidden” from realizing my true career choice.

Unlike Fred, who knew and chose what he loved to do, Erik knew what he wanted but felt that realizing his wish was somehow forbidden. A successful financier, Erik came to me at age fifty, looking for a career change. Though successful in his work, he felt vocationally stuck. “I just don’t know what I’d really like to do,” he told me.

“If you had no limitations and could make your career dream come true,” queried I, trotting out the magic question. “What would you choose to do?”

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“I don’t know,” said Erik, “but I know what I want to do when I retire.”

“What’s that?”

“I’d like to study philosophy and work in education,” he said decisively. “The truth is, I’d like to be a philosopher.”

“What makes you feel you are not a philosopher already?” I pursued.

“Oh, come on, there’s no way I could go and study now. I was never a great student. But you know what? Even if I don’t study philosophy, deep down, I’ll always be a philosopher.”

Erik’s psychometric assessment showed a very high learning ability and a pronounced bent for culture, education, and abstract thought. Since Erik was financially independent he could afford to work part time and begin studying right away. We both knew the path was there for him to walk. The choice was in his hands.

“Who’s keeping you from choosing freely right here, right now?” I asked him.

“I don’t know,” he answered. “I just feel stuck; something is prohibiting me from following my true choice. Maybe I’m not allowed to. How can a respectable middle-aged man suddenly go and do whatever he pleases?”

“Why not?”

“You know what? I always thought that when I would retire, I would be able to study philosophy – so why not now?”

It was the start of a long, hard road. His difficulty with permitting himself to reach for fulfillment was embedded in the past. Erik had to struggle, not only with himself, but also with his dead father, who eighty years earlier had lost his own father and been obliged to make an overnight transformation from outstanding student – a real philosopher – to family breadwinner.

“Even after he became wealthy,” Erik recalled, “his eyes shone with excitement every time I discussed philosophy with him. Then very quickly the light would be extinguished and he would say, ‘Let’s cut this nonsense and deal with reality.’ We both knew that he dreamed about philosophy, ethics, and the human spirit. But how could someone with a family to support allow himself to spend time on this sort of spiritual luxury? In those days, I guess people didn’t think in terms of integrating philosophy with making a living.”

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Erik adopted his father's prohibition. He came up against the classic conflict of the unfulfilled parent – the parent who wants to see their offspring's dreams come true, but can't let it happen. The inner pain and the unconscious jealousy are connected with the parent's feelings of having missed out themselves. Parents for whom permission was denied to fulfill their true choices are in turn unable to hand it down to their children.

Erik was one of those people whose careers were stuck even though they knew what they really wanted to do. Their inner inability to gain self-actualization generally derives from their identification with a vocationally unfulfilled, frustrated parent with whom the child wouldn't want to compete.

2. I am “forbidden” to know that it is my right to choose.

This category describes people who are not allowed to know what they want to do and how or what to choose. This often happens to children whose parents are divorced, formally or emotionally.

Tammy described her parents' “emotional divorce” very clearly: “I can recall when in the middle of a family conversation they would suddenly ask me: ‘Tammy, sweetheart, who do you love more, Mommy or Daddy?’ I never answered. I thought that if I said that I loved one of them more, something terrible would happen and one of them would leave home. I felt as if it would be like choosing only one of them, and therefore it was impossible for me to answer.”

Tammy learned not to choose. She didn't know how to choose a name for her daughter, she couldn't decide whether to order meat or fish at a restaurant, and she was ambivalent about what to major in at college. Her inability to choose, dating back to her childhood, infringed on every imaginable sphere of her life. Through intensive counseling, comprehension slowly dawned on Tammy that no child can hold together their parents' failing marriage.

The prohibition on knowing and choosing can also come from another source – our own sense of responsibility. Choice and self-knowledge imply action. Many people have trouble implementing the necessary action. From an early age they learn that not knowing is preferable: when you don't know,

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you don't have to make a choice; and thus there is no need to implement a responsible action.

Change also requires the assimilating of new knowledge, and incorporating it as Tammy did, when she understood that she couldn't save her parents' marriage. Unlike Tammy, Fred's prohibition was manifested in the way he related to his actions. For Fred, the journalist, knowing what he wanted was linked with the permission to choose and the obligation to act; once he knew, he would have to do something about it. When not knowing is a person's primary, existential defense, knowing becomes a threat.

To know what you want means being committed to act upon it. Taking action leads to performance which in turn implies a measurable benchmark of success or failure.

3. I don't know what to choose or what to do.

This category describes people who opt not to know what they want to do, period. The most famous of these is Peter Pan. Being grounded in reality certainly doesn't appeal to Peter Pan; free flight without commitment is his preferred lifestyle. Peter surrounds himself with children, almost as if it's his unpaid calling. Possibly not even one of the millions of children who have come to love Peter Pan over the years has ever asked the question: What does Peter Pan do? What is his job?

The eternal student who can never commit is the modern incarnation of the Peter Pan character. He rambles around from one faculty to another, constantly changing courses, and when asked what he does for a living falls back on the standard reply, "I'm still at university." In other words, "I haven't chosen yet, because I still don't know."

The 'I don't know' category also includes children who are obedient to their parents' vocational wishes and, later on, to social mores. Many of the best of these become dissatisfied teachers, doctors and engineers, choosing vocations that are expected of them, yet often deny their inner needs. This may lead to chronic dissatisfaction and a never-ending search for career fulfillment.

Naomi was a typical "good daughter" who didn't know what to choose. She had been sent to study at a teachers training college, a presupposed track

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that would enable her to make a respectable living and be a good wife. Lacking maturity, Naomi was unable to oppose the vocational course chosen for her by her parents, who knew very little of her inner world and her deepest needs. Since Naomi had little self-confidence, she accepted the choice her parents made and became an average, ordinary teacher. Only when she recognized that a fulfilled career is all about identifying one's needs, did she understand that she was allowed to take responsibility for the path she would walk and the vocation she would pursue.

My own father, himself a frustrated teacher, told me more than once, "Forget about all this psychology stuff and go be a teacher. Teaching has everything: a reasonable salary, vacations, and women who help each other." When I qualified with a Masters Degree in Clinical Psychology, something to make any parent proud, my father mildly disappointed, and perhaps slightly envious, said to me, "So does that mean you're not going to be a teacher?" And I, to comfort him, smiled graciously, "Don't worry Daddy, I can teach psychology at university," and decided to begin working as a teaching assistant.

A fair share of those who choose a "secure profession" such as engineering, law, or medicine, do so thinking that they will be ensured of a steady income. Affinity for the field is less important in their eyes. Nor is much importance attached to the fact that sometimes their talents turn out to lie in a completely different discipline.

"You're right," a father once told me, acknowledging the contradiction between his son's talents and his son's occupation, "but it's important to me that my son should have a good profession, even if he never practices it..."

The myth of choosing a good profession has changed with the spirit of the times, since choosing a "good profession" should be defined by an individual's best qualities, skills, and their inner desire.

4. I am "forbidden" to recognize that my choices suit me.

The fourth type of impasse involves those who are permitted to choose and to find fulfillment, but are not allowed to acknowledge and enjoy it either internally or externally. Daniel, the multimedia professional whose story was

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told in chapter one, belongs to this group. He worked in the multimedia world but was convinced he was in the wrong profession. He projected such flagrant dissatisfaction that eventually he was almost fired from his job.

People who experience this kind of prohibition tend to be children of parents who themselves lived with an ongoing experience of non-fulfillment. Despite having chosen a career path they liked, they were never able to recognize having done so. Daniel's father was a graphic artist, but because of the grandfather's verdict that "only a painter is a true artist," both Daniel and his father lived with the feeling that being a graphic artist was never enough, even though this was their true calling.

In such cases, awareness of the vocational multigenerational trap is the first step out of it. The second step is being able to rethink negative family perceptions and being able to reconstruct your own definitions without losing sight of a traditional family calling.

5. I don't know how to realize my choices.

This category includes the people who know what they want to do, but don't know how to go about doing it or what vocational tools should be acquired. These people are high-risk candidates for missing out on fulfillment. Among them are many charismatic people with proven talents, perseverance, and courage who are unable to focus their resources and take the plunge. They see the objective clearly but fail to identify the road or the means to take them there.

Stuart was a talented businessman who had no idea of how to set boundaries in his work environment. He was unable to anchor a contract in reality, or conduct negotiations to achieve his targets. The commercial spark burned relentlessly in his belly, yet Stuart seemed doomed to an ongoing Sisyphus-like struggle of success and failure.

Stuart came from an extremely deprived family. The physical hunger of his childhood was transformed into a desire to gobble everything up as a businessman. He had no clear boundaries whatsoever. For example, as a child his parents had never bought him ice cream, so the adult Stuart strived to own the entire ice cream store. Paying little attention to food costs or



inventory, his uneconomical decisions jeopardized his investments. When he learned to analyze his mistakes and gradually build new, reparative experiences, he was able to take a more studied approach to building new business ventures, without rushing into things in the destructively impetuous manner of his earlier years.

Stuart learned that by setting boundaries and creating order – rules, policies, and protocols – he could set up an effective system that would survive in times of both crisis and prosperity.

6. I don't want to know what my real calling is.

This category describes people with overly high expectations of themselves, who find it almost impossible to accept their real calling, because making a commitment demands their total being and may even compromise their inner truth.

Knowing this, and because in their conceptual world there is no room for compromise, they sometimes prefer to remain on the outside until conditions improve.

Perfectionists fall into this category. They set precise tasks for themselves but the path to realization is so tortuous that some prefer to give up before even starting. The need for perfection is cruel. Giving up on realization is such an easy way out, that sometimes the perfectionist prefers to merely examine the pros and cons, and rarely moves into the implementation stage.

The perfectionist typically wonders: Is all of this work worth my while? He or she doesn't take into account two critical things: One, this is my life we're talking about here. Two, can I achieve a less perfect goal but at the same time, paradoxically, find myself in a much happier world, and ease off my expectations?

Leo was such a case. Leo's mother died immediately after he was born. He was an exceptionally wise and logical child. His tyrant father was an immature control freak who inwardly blamed his son for his wife's death, partly so as to absolve himself of any involvement in his wife's pregnancy and tragic death. Until the age of five, Leo's father educated him in an uncompromising, rigid manner devoid of any kindness or warmth. Only total perfection was permitted, only excellence pleased him. Compromise was not a word Leo

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learned from his father as part of the vocabulary needed for life.

“I reduced my world to a minimum of needs, and applied myself to each new task so thoroughly that there was nothing left for me in life other than completing each new mission,” related Leo.

Although Leo was an extremely gifted child, he was never able to choose one single area of activity for himself, or define his true calling. He was never able to tell himself what he would really have chosen had he dared taken the leap.

When expert after expert repeatedly commented, “If only you would choose, the Nobel Prize would be a piece of cake for you.”

“So maybe not choosing is preferable,” was Leo’s standard reply.

Leo was so wrapped up inside his expectations of absolute perfectionism that he was never able to free himself of his chains – committing to only one area of his multi-talents would lead him to suffering total commitment, yet with little reward because of his painstaking self-criticism that nothing would ever be good enough in any way.

For many people in this category, accepting their true calling is an almost impossible mission; only long and dedicated self-work can eventually lessen their unrealistic expectations of themselves.

7. I’m indecisive yet deep down I know what I want to do.

A wise man I once knew described the seventh category best: On a flight, once you decide to order chicken, you have simultaneously decided against ordering the beef. Making decisions involves setting limitations, which is problematic for many people who have trouble making up their minds.

Still, there are those who are capable of deciding what they want when they are quite young regarding love or vocational choices. Such people often feel as if a clear inner voice helps them to make the correct choices. For example, a young woman of twenty can choose a spouse with whom a happy marriage will ensue for the next fifty years.

These clear inner voices help people make decisions in their career choices and in all areas of life. There are many people who acquire their chosen profession when they are still quite young and continue with it happily through

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old age.

8. I'm indecisive and can't commit to any decision.

In contrast, there are many talented people who cannot decide. Some, for example, can't make a decision to study law because this may prevent them from studying something else. I call this kind of person a 'Vocational Don Juan'; a person who wants to keep all their options open. These folks enjoy vocational conquests and change occupations as often as possible. They are constantly seduced by the opportunity of a more romantic prospect. They go on deluding themselves that somewhere out there is a profession they have yet to discover. Even when they recognize that moving from one profession to another means failure, they still have trouble in committing to a specific choice. A person who chronically avoids making critical vocational decisions, tends to avoid the possibility of finding the profession that is already there, deep down inside him.

"Fear of deciding is driving me nuts," I was told one day by a talented, successful man named Richard, who constantly changed jobs. "Now I want to go back to school to study architecture, but what will happen if after four years I suddenly find that this profession bores me yet again?"

"So what would happen?" I asked him.

"I'd change it," replied Richard.

We both knew that with vocational change, the process was liable simply to repeat itself, unless Richard would accept his liabilities and find his calling within his untamed boundaries. Richard's problems centered on his difficulty to committing himself, rather than deciding on a profession. These kinds of people find difficulty in committing to long-term relationships in all aspects of their lives. The more they become involved with something or someone, the more they feel suffocated and quickly seek the nearest escape route; only to repeat the never-ending cycle.

9. My career choices are influenced by a personal trauma.

The ninth category includes people who have suffered some terrible trauma that deflects their original choice away from its natural course. In such cases, the trauma may only find its expression later on in a person's life. For

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example, a talented artist to be, following the traumatic loss of a parent to a difficult illness, may suddenly register for a different track, completely unrelated to his authentic desires. Such children can invest long, hard years of study in a challenging profession only to reach the age of forty with the notion that only now are they entitled to choose their true calling.

Craig's situation illustrates this conflict well. His mother had been ill with multiple sclerosis for many years and the disease had fascinated the inquisitive child. He was convinced that if he became a specialist in that field, he could personally find a cure for his ailing mother.

"I thought that if I studied intensely," said Craig, "I would discover a new drug that would save her life. I was determined to become a doctor, and that's what I did a few years after her death. Today I'm an excellent doctor, but I always have this feeling that something is missing in my soul."

A short historical review of Craig's family background brought an interesting finding to light. Other than Craig, all the members of his family were successful businesspeople. Through gaining an understanding of what Craig really wanted, I clearly saw that the family talent had not passed him by, and that he had simply been sidetracked by the trauma of his mother's lengthy illness and slow death.

I counseled Craig to avoid making any sudden transitions. He began his new career slowly by importing a drug for skin diseases which turned out to be an outstanding success on the domestic market. "When I'm sure that the business world is really right for me," Craig said at one of our last sessions, "I'll integrate all my medical knowledge with my business skills. Until now I've always felt that as long as I'm saving lives and healing people, I'm saving my mother. Maybe now I'm ready to let go of the illusion that I can cure her and the rest of the world. Lately, though, what really turns me on is the passion of unleashing my entrepreneurial skills."

Craig reached the stage where it was permissible for him to bypass his life trauma and move ahead with his true choices. He was liberated from the burden of his self-imposed duty to save his mother's life, and could redirect his energies fully to the business ventures he really wanted to pursue.

10. My career is influenced by coping with my childhood experiences.

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The last type of impasse includes people who underwent early life experiences that continue to block them from making full use of their talents or exploring their core vocational choices. Some of them even feel compelled to turn these experiences into their life's work.

Geraldine came to me in a state of total despair. She was twenty-six and had no profession. "Nothing really interests me," she told me. "I don't feel that there's any one vocational area that I really like."

The key to this puzzle was buried in her childhood. Geraldine was an emotionally abused child. "My father was constantly hounding me," she said. "He was always checking what I hadn't done well, which homework assignments I hadn't completed, what housework I had shirked. I was the daughter who got the short end of the stick. Misery was my permanent state of being."

Geraldine's passport to life finally came from her career in the army. Far from home, she found a niche of her own by specializing in helping soldiers whose commanders abused them. She knew all the relevant laws and military protocols by heart and would unabashedly let those in charge know when they had broken regulations. Many officers on the base didn't like her, but the soldiers adored her.

"And now, several years after your discharge, do you feel you have a profession?"

"No," said Geraldine.

"What if I were to tell you," I said, "that you actually do have a profession and all you have to do is translate it into your life?"

At subsequent sessions we looked at several possibilities for Geraldine where she could counsel people on how to cope with intimidating bureaucrats and government offices of higher authority. Eventually Geraldine went back to school and studied tax consulting. She ended up specializing in helping people who felt threatened and exploited by the income tax authorities.

Geraldine leveraged her childhood experiences and her coping skills by putting all of that to work in her professional life. All she needed from me was a process of recognizing and accepting that her style of coping was actually a respected vocation and her personal calling.



B. WHERE AM I STUCK?

Four Dimensions of Insight

Once you have identified which category/categories you fit into – you may find parts of your impasse overlap with more than one category – or otherwise figured out where you are vocationally stuck, we can add four additional dimensions to help you understand your career impasse. They are listed here in descending order of difficulty in bringing about transformation or career change.

1. Vocational Change

This dimension refers to a person's specific vocation or profession that no longer provides fulfilling vocational self-expression. Impasse of this kind is long and difficult because moving beyond it requires a fundamental change in the nature and content of a person's work; a complete change of profession. This change in turn demands a transformation in the way a significant part of a person's inner self is reflected by their career and work environment. People at this stage of impasse feel that their basic need to express who they are, via what they do for a living, is in need of profound modification.

2. Vocational Growth

This dimension refers to when a person has maximized a certain stage of emotional development and self-development and is unable to move on because of a need to grow and advance within the same career direction. Often this type of person is unequipped to understand or function at a more sophisticated emotional level. Although this may be experienced as a crisis, it can actually become the catalyst that will drive the person to a higher level of emotional maturity. This demands inner emotional development and new perspectives in terms of self-image and relationships with others. The result of this process is sometimes manifested in a change in a person's inner vocational dimensions – for example, moving from a mediocre income to an increased income; moving from being an ordinary manager to a strategic manager; moving from being a supporting actor to a protagonist.

For something like that to happen, a person needs a greater capacity to

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deal effectively with themselves and their environment. Sometimes what is needed is an improvement in self-image, or the ability to face and be liberated from certain fears that are holding the person back. This can include fear of expressing aggression, fear of failure, fear of success, and so on. Thus, a person's self-development is often expressed when undertaking a new level of responsibility, creativity, management, or other work related element.

3. Context Change within a Profession

A third dimension of impasse involves the context of a person's work. This refers to how a person is stuck in terms of work context, position, and scope and moving forward requires understanding of all these dimensions within the system or organization where a person functions. Often, there is a deep, inner need to grow further within the context of one's chosen profession. This may demand specific understanding of the person's present work context – as well as recognition of intergenerational family patterns and role relationships – for optimizing work performance and satisfaction. Changes may include moving from a big organization to a smaller one, and visa versa; or moving from being an employee to becoming self-employed, and visa versa; or moving from partnership to working alone, and visa versa.

4. Wider Self-Expression

This dimension of impasse relates to a person's need to widen and enhance self-expression through work or non-related work activities. A person's 'Activity Pie' includes the sum total of their scope, variety, and undertakings in terms of work and home. Career burnout can sometimes happens when a person lacks the existential need, in whatever proportion, for self-expression which can sometimes lead to quenching the desire to perform, and draining any hope of satisfaction. Often the simple act of exploring, identifying, and integrating a meaningful pursuit or new hobby – whether work related or not – into a person's life formula can heal a vocational frustration and infuse a sense of satisfaction.

C. HOW CAN I MOVE ON?

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Six Stages of the Journey

When you are stuck in one way or another in your vocational life, I have found that a commitment to a journey that will lead you to breakthrough has six stages on the path towards moving beyond impasse.

Stage 1 – Awareness

In the first stage of a career change, you need to recognize and identify the situation in which you find yourself, and be able to declare, “I am stuck in my career; I am at a career impasse,” as opposed to being stuck in some other place or in some other part of your life.

You need to be able to recognize that what is happening to you is a situation involving work-related impasse. People in this stage will typically say things like “I’m stuck in my career and can’t get moving,” “I’m unmotivated at work,” “This just isn’t it,” “I have to change jobs but don’t know what new job to choose,” “I don’t feel like getting up in the morning,” “Every day at this job is torture,” etc.

People are scared of the idea of facing up to the knowledge that they are experiencing a career crisis and sometimes suppress their awareness of the impasse. But, generally, coping with it becomes inevitable, since stress intensifies with time.

From my perspective, I have seen that getting stuck on a career path is a healthy and dynamic part of life for a developing human being. When people experience their work as something they are in control of, they allow themselves to do a little stock-taking once in a while. Sometimes they are satisfied with what they are doing; sometimes they feel stuck. Some people are frightened of this sense of impasse and rush to circumvent it or dig their heels in and oppose it, yet others see impasse as an opportunity for change and for creating a breakthrough. Either way, awareness of work-related impasse is a precondition for the next stage.

Stage 2 – Diagnosis

The next phase is the diagnostic stage where you need to identify what is causing your career to be stuck. (Please refer to the earlier sections in the Appendix where ten categories and four dimensions of impasse were

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explained.)

When you are able to examine or diagnose the impasse you are experiencing, you are more than likely to discover more than one category of impasse with more than one way-station along the journey. That is because by nature, human beings are complicated and cannot be categorized into exact boxes. Still, you will find that a clear diagnosis helps clarify the stages of dealing with each category. By focusing on the relevant challenge, you will be able to define action items for implementation – a necessary step towards making progress along your journey.

Stage 3 – Confrontation

The next phase in the journey is confronting the void or the sense of emptiness. This is a complex and difficult stage, if not the most difficult step of the journey. You are by now aware of the problem, have diagnosed it, but you have still not discovered the best way to solve your impasse. This stage demands intuitive listening to one's inner self, which usually demands a quiet time-out from your work or home life in order to cope with the turmoil and confusion. You can help yourself to move forward by finding a sympathetic ear, reading self-help books, or consulting with a professional. In order for new data to be absorbed, there has to be room for it. A quiet period is necessary in order to hear the cry from within and focus on reconnecting to your root sources while rediscovering your personal vision. Paying attention to your inner voice, is a must in order to move on to the next stage. Sometimes, the void can be experienced as a kind of catastrophe, but only from this state of emptiness can one be filled anew. The knowledge that this stage is temporary makes it easier to bear.

Stage 4 – Vision

The fourth stage of the journey lies in identifying your vision and deciding where you want to go and where you are headed. For many people who don't know where they are headed, or haven't yet defined their vision, it is usually because either something unknown or some concrete fear is holding them back. You may very well be undergoing similar feelings.

Over the decades, I have learned to respect this lack of recognition of a person's will or vocational dream. Rushing things is inadvisable. If you feel

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you are unable to accept certain truths about yourself, or unable to reconcile your life's dream with reality, you may have a good reason, without understanding why. Sometimes the prohibition relates to a lack of permission – from family and society; or obedience to morals and preconceptions – in order for you to fulfill your dream.

Sometimes the tools needed to make your dream come true are missing, and not knowing what they are is a way of fending off frustration. People want to feel they have maximized their options in life. Missing out on one's vocation is a devastating feeling, not only for you, but also for your family.

Deep down, most people intuitively know what road they were meant to take in life. Sometimes, fulfilling the dream demands a confrontation with uncomfortable scenarios that may include envy and rivalry, greed and fear, and so on. Moreover, acknowledgment of a dream begets almost a self-imposed command to accomplish it or be forever banished to face the knowledge that you are living with an unfulfilled dream. An even more painful punishment is handed out to those who prefer to ignore their dream or bury it completely. Living with the feeling that one's life is passing by without fulfilling one's true calling, career or dream, is possibly the closest to a living death.

Stage 5 – Training

This stage of the journey refers to equipping yourself with tools and mentors who will train you and help you pursue the path to fulfillment of your vision quest, or your next step towards change.

Once you have figured out where you want to go vocationally, you have now reached the practical stage where you need to ask constructive questions such as: How do I proceed from here to reaching my goal? What route should I take? What tools do I need? What pace should I set? Who will guide and advise me? Who will share my journey? Who will I separate from along the way?

Obviously, the clearer your direction and goal, the greater potential you will have for success. Wherever you invest optimal effort, you will be granted maximum help and your passion will instill passion in others; in other words, "God helps those who help themselves."

During this phase, you need to gather all your strength and carefully plan

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your way by paying attention to detail without being tempted by shortcuts or being vulnerable to opportunists.

Proceeding attentively shortens the route to fulfilling your dream.

Stage 6 – Fulfillment

The last stage is arriving at a sense of accomplishment. However, this is an ongoing process, and you must always be aware of the fact that one day, you will more than likely face your next impasse... and the next... and so on. People who feel that they're doing the work they were meant to do and achieving their vocational vision describe their fulfillment as "Every day brings me new excitement," "Finally I'm doing what I always wanted to do," "I never felt so whole before," "I'm full of energy."

During this phase, it's important to note that there will always be ups and downs, and one day, when you may hit impasse again, you will be able to decipher it as a breakthrough to your next stage of development.

Conclusion

So, dear reader, the tale is told... but the story's not over yet.

In this appendix, I have described some of the processes and tools that can be of help to you. Each process of figuring out what is happening and what it means requires considerable investment and commitment. I have chosen to view these processes as journeys on the way to further developing your life and career quests. In all of these shared journeys, beyond the pain and the frustration, there is the happiness and satisfaction that come with growth and fulfillment, with finding your path, and walking it.

To all of you who have traveled this literal journey with me, I wish for each of you a personal journey that will be true, enduring, and fulfilling.

Learn from others and teach yourselves.

Seek your path.

Trust its wisdom.

Never give up on your dreams.

Go out there and find your Promised Land