


MASTERING **MIDLIFE** REINVENTIONSM



*A Collection of Life-Changing
Tools and Principles to Make
Our Futures Greater*

Karen Sands, MCC

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Online entrepreneur Karen Sands, MCC, The Everyday FuturistSM, is the publisher of the complimentary monthly eletter *Future Works® Gazette* and <http://www.karensands.com/blog>. To sign up for her complimentary eletter and blog, and to learn more about her tools for positively transforming yourself and your world, visit www.KarenSands.com on your journey to a greater future.

Author's Note

Experience has shown that what keeps us on the road to a great future, personally and professionally, is to have a set of core tenets that guide us even when the going gets rough.

Mastering Midlife Reinvention is a compilation of articles written over two decades that are based on a sampling of 52 principles for reinventing your life and your world.

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About the Author

I am Karen Sands, ICF Master Certified Coach, Author, Speaker, and The Everyday Futurist. For nearly forty years, I have mentored extraordinary change in clients seeking more meaningful, profitable, and satisfying lives and businesses or careers that rock.

I coach conscious movers & shakers, visionaries, and visionaries-in-the-making committed to living their full potential and bringing the best of their gifts to others. They are enlightened, accomplished, savvy women and men who seek to leverage life's transitions to reinvent themselves and revolutionize their world.

My customized and integrated approach includes expert business strategies, visioning exercises, course-correction assessments and tools, and empowering approaches for all of life. Together, we discover how you can best live so that you manifest a life that is prosperous as well as meaningful . . . and create a money-making future that matters . . . that makes a long-lasting difference.

In this e-book, I offer you some essential principles to catalyzing greater futures, not only for yourself, but for your family, community, and world. We sometimes forget the strength of our gifts and our character; this book and I are here to remind you of what is possible, so we can bring a new vitality to these challenging times and look toward greater tomorrows for us all.

What People Are Saying About My Work and the Principles

Karen “centered” me and showed me that it was possible to create and live my dreams. She consistently, persistently challenged me to pursue what we discerned that I wanted. A wise, vibrant no-nonsense woman, Karen is a dynamic, down-to-earth, and spiritual teacher/coach. She has the high-powered business background and experience that I wanted to grow and expand myself. I would highly recommend Karen as a coach for anyone who wants to have the life they dream of and to live that life to the fullest!

—Paula A. Rogers, Founder and Owner, PAR Group Retail Consultants

Karen helped me to be as intensely passionate about my work as I am clear, concise, objective, and balanced in my life. She has an innate ability to bring out passions that I was not even aware that I had, and the process was so much fun! I never expected to laugh so much over what are usually considered to be “heavy” issues. An intuitive and analytical coach, Karen helps people look into their souls, see through their “programming,” and convert their inner gold into viable currency.

—Larry Fish, CPA, MBA, CFO & Entrepreneur Supreme

Karen helped me to see myself as I truly am. A gifted, insightful, intuitive, and very wise coach, she has helped me design and install a wisdom chip that helps me be conscious about why I’m making decisions, so I can align with what I want vs. going with what others expect. My professional leadership and communication skills have also been greatly enhanced by our work together. Karen doesn’t sugarcoat the truth and she doesn’t let me off the hook, yet she makes me laugh! And she did it by phone—without the benefit of visual cues! I think of Karen as “wisdom on call.”

—Jonna Kurucz, Senior VP National Sales Nextel

Karen’s “coaching” is a unique combination of her comprehensive, heartfelt, authentic talents and knowledge. Karen’s ability to see all sides of an issue teams with her extensive business experience and her innate abilities. She is able to create new pathways and realistic solutions that enable individuals and organizations to overcome obstacles and transcend the limitations of indecision.

—Martin D. Kupper, Director of Sales, Leadership Network Corporation

Introduction

*The individual, transformed, will perceive new meaning to his life,
to events, to numbers, to interactions between people.*

—Dr. W. Edwards Deming

Approaching the apex of our youthful years, disillusionment spreads like molten lava burning up all that is not real. It is the primary task of midlife to confront our “reality” and to let go of cherished illusions like the childhood motto, “Follow the golden rule and nothing bad will happen to you.” Or our Pollyana-ish belief that our dearest ones will never betray or leave us ... or that good always prevails over evil. Perhaps the hardest of all to swallow are the dreams never realized, the opportunities now lost to our receding youth—the never will be’s.

Midlife disillusionment is poignantly expressed by a 61-year-old male client who beseeches, “I did everything I was supposed to: I rose to the top of my field, earned seven figures, traveled the world, and had my pick of women. I got everything I wanted, and I still don’t have what I need.”

What we need to do now more than ever is to ask ourselves and those we serve, “What really matters?”

Change comes whether we like it or not, so the sooner we learn how to let go, the easier it will be to cross into what business futurist Ian Morrison calls the “second curve of change into the future.”

Many of us find ourselves mired in youthful choices, trying to hold onto the “life is good” phase between the old and the new curve. Our attempts are futile. The time between is fleeting. We must discard what was illusory. What is required of us is to position ourselves for the future by dealing with what’s on our plate.

A number of global and national disasters from earthquakes to tsunamis to hurricanes and terrorist activities have forced us to wake up to a shocking reality that we too are vulnerable. What we need to do now more than ever is to ask ourselves and those we serve, “What really matters?” Each of us has to tend to the state of our Souls and the Soul of our state ... and the planet.

Those of us in our 40s, 50s and 60s are returning to the values of our youth. Many of us abandoned our spirits when we left “flower power” behind. Too many of us forgot that love does matter. Most are searching for a connection to something greater than we are. Many are burned out, disappointed, and longing to tap “free spirit” again. As we face worldwide crises and as our dearest-held values are assaulted everywhere, we are reconnecting to Soul.

It's time we learned to master midlife reinvention, to bring forth the "New SixtiesSM." We seek the gentle days of flower power and the visionary power of "We Shall Overcome." We want our freedom back. What else is there really?

All we really know for sure is that our time is fleeting. And that our planet is in a critical stage of development: It will either dissipate or jump to a higher level of existence.

The paradigm is shifting right before us:

- Climate change increases worldwide natural disasters: earthquakes, hurricanes, tornadoes, tsunamis
- Thousands killed in Iraq and Afghanistan
- More terrorist attacks and suicide bombings
- Another Great Recession, while banks make record profits

Petty tyrants of the world leverage the impoverished and disenfranchised to justify keeping them in power. If we only could return to being the beacon of freedom and inclusion. We've blown it in Iraq. We thought we had it covered. We didn't rebuild fast enough. A strong growing middle class would have nipped the insurgency in the bud. Instead, like in France, Holland, Great Britain, and elsewhere, there are the have-nots all waiting for a new "ism" to rescue them. In the US, 10% unemployment is the new norm.

As we go through an epoch change, the "we versus them" mentality gets stoked to the max. Fear drives people to over-manage, over-control, and operate from overreaction instead of responding.

It's the same here in the U.S., just a different venue. We too have whittled away our middle-class. I remember in Mayor Koch's time, New York City became a city of the "haves" and the "have-nots." Our arrogance and righteousness has gotten us into trouble. Perhaps we were asleep. Thinking it couldn't happen here. Not again. But there's no hiding from it now as we are truly in a Darth Vaderesque fight for our very way of life. Everything our country was founded on must prevail or we will all disappear in the gap.

Worlds are clashing. Religions are vying for domain and dominion. Psychopaths are coming together to plan the demise of our way of life. Democracy or theocracy: Which is it going to be?

In the clutch, I'm still a "human possibilitarian." I look for patterns and trends to find the way future-forward. Then I remember: always a crisis, then a resolution. We are at the gap. Are we learning from our mistakes and missteps? Can we let go of our adolescent Wild West pioneer mentality? We are a mature nation and citizens of a new global village.

We can choose breakthrough. That means all of us giving life our all—and doing it together. That means each of us reaching for our own greatness. It's dissipate or evolve.

We have to decide who and what we want to be about. This might be our last chance. We can choose breakthrough. That means all of us giving life our all—and doing it together. That means each of us reaching for our own greatness. It's dissipate or evolve.

Every day I hear about the impotent rage we feel. Pent-up frustration. Fear. Information overwhelm. Success intoxication. Total exhaustion. Not enough satisfaction. Time going faster than ever. Too many of us are stuck in first-gear or having burned too much rubber.

For those of us who have reached the summit of success, who live “the good life” and have achieved even a modicum of self-actualization, we are the ones who can change the course we are on.

It is time for reinvention.

Flower power may be a thing of the past, but we can now turn that power into a vital force for our future.

We can either seek revolution or evolution. I prefer the latter. Extremists always prefer the former. We are facing a significant worldview-shifting structural change. Which way will we choose?

With our visions firmly before us, we can widen the field of human possibility. Many of us have begun reinventing our world. Have you?

Chapter 1

Take the Success Assessment

Getting to Your NEXT STEP Means First Knowing Where You Are

The tools and principles that follow are fundamental to ensuring the evolution of your personal gifts ... and the evolution of our world. I hope they inspire you to tap the depth of your greatness as we face today's challenging realities, so you can look toward reinventing a greater tomorrow. Whether it's your business, your key relationships, or your personal life, it's easy to get off track, spin out, or get buried under. Without a true sense of where you are in the moment, it is impossible to realize your dreams.

A Success Assessment™ is a compass-like tool you can use to keep yourself on target while your vision unfolds. When you started your career or company, no doubt you had a vision of what you wanted to accomplish and how you wanted to live your life. Do you remember what that was? Are you close to realizing that vision? The best way to find out is to ask these three litmus-test questions listed below of yourself and your key relationships.

Your evolution is dependent on knowing where you are now and where you are headed.
Then close the gap.

You may be surprised at what you learn. Just remember most of us have an easier time keeping our eyes on the quantifiable goals while the quality of our lives gets forgotten. It doesn't matter whether you are a spanking new start-up, an accomplished business owner taking a new leap, or a visionary at the helm of a non-profit, it's critical to take a periodic reality check. Remember: Knowledge is power, so go for it!

What's it like to know me?

At first this may seem like a no-brainer question to answer. Put whatever comes to you down on paper. If you have trouble getting started, ask yourself some probing questions. For instance, when you're with someone you care about, do you consume the conversation with how you're doing? Or do you listen to what's going on in her or his life? Be honest with yourself. Find out if you are really who you think you are.

Bringing the best of who you are to the world means a more meaningful life for you and better lives for others.

When you feel complete with this question, take a few moments to reflect on the last six months. Have you been the person you want to be? In what ways have you missed the mark, and how have you hit it? Try ranking yourself between plus or minus ten.

Next, pick five really important people to answer this same question. Ask your mom, your best friend, your daughter, your brother, and, of course, your lover. Now don't forget: Ask for the whole truth. Then find a quiet time by yourself to compare responses.

What's it like to work with me?

This one's a bit tougher. It helps to view this process as an "internal customer satisfaction survey." Remember to tell your partners, employees, subcontractors, and vendors that their answers will not put them on the skids with you.

Even the most visionary of entrepreneurs forget to "walk their talk." Discover whether you are a "Red Herring Deadliner," an "Ice Queen" running hot and cold, or a "Crazy-Making" leader without clearly defined parameters and little or no follow-up. Any of these ring a bell?

Although what you hear may give you an ouch or two, don't be too hard on yourself. You may just have been so busy reaching for your goals that you've lost your Soul-connection to your team. Go through the steps in question one. Reflect, write your answers down, and give yourself a score. Then ask five people you work with and compare your answers to theirs.

What's it like to be my client?

To get a handle on this, first ask yourself, "Would I buy from my company?" Be totally honest with yourself. Then go ahead and ask five of your best customers. Involving them in this exercise is a sure step to making your clients part of your extended team.

Gather up your courage and also ask those who got away. I know this is really difficult to do. Just remember the golden rule of business: It's far easier to sell to an existing client than it is to get a new one! Find out why they leave, so you can reverse the flow.

To make this easier to do, position your inquiries as part of your "external customer satisfaction survey" with exit interviews. Since somebody else got them if you didn't, make sure to find out who your competition is and how you stack up with them. Wouldn't it be nice if this discovery process brought a customer back?

Creating routine check-ins like these will allow you to position yourself and your business as one that is continuously reaching for excellence. Go take the challenge! Be the success you are meant to be.

Bringing the best of who you are to the world means a more meaningful life for you and better lives for others.

Chapter 2

Recycle, Retread ... Reinvent *Discover the Essentials of Reinvention*

It started one day when I looked around my highly coveted corner office. The sun streamed in, warming me and illuminating the piles of memoranda, research, and unanswered telephone messages stacked on my glistening fuchsia lacquered desk.

I leaned back in my executive chair and wondered why I was there ...

On another bright sunny day, ten years before, I was walking down the Avenue of the Americas with my lover. We were both running successful businesses and creating a wonderful life together. The whole world seemed to be ahead of us as we strolled along, sharing our dreams. I pointed to the top of a cluster of skyscrapers, the bastion of big business and seven-figure incomes. “I want to work there,” I said. And I did. I climbed my way up.

But the view from the top proved to be very different from my original view from the street. I’d gotten what I’d wanted, but at what cost?

I thought of:

... the abusive, driven bosses I had put up with along the way.

... my “real woman” role model—powerful, vulnerable, compassionate—out-manuevered and crucified by her most trusted allies.

... our two “little ones” who would be graduating soon. Custody conflicts had kept me from them when they were small. Now they were home, and I was an absentee mom.

... my lover and second husband. He was always there for me. He had made my kids his own. Yet I was always at the office, working late, dragging home an enormous briefcase on the weekends ...

The sunlight continued to stream through my window, but I felt cold. What had happened to my aliveness, my juicy feminine passions, the freshness I’d had when I’d started out on this path to “fame and fortune”?

I was in a hurry, but where was I going? Where had the time gone? What was I trying to prove, and to whom?

My story is not unique. I hear it repeated again and again, by both women and men, from the hallowed halls of corporate America to the ivory towers of academia and the street-fighting world of self-made millionaires and billionaires.

These movers and shakers are CEOs, maverick entrepreneurs, and independent professionals. Some have achieved tremendous success so quickly that they have fried their circuits in the process, burning out in their twenties. Others have high-income careers but are bored or dissatisfied, trapped by the demands of their voracious lifestyles.

Then there are those in senior positions who have invested “their all” in a company, for years, only to be forced out, downsized or retired, written off as casualties of political hit-men or the oscillating economic downturn. Accustomed to high six- and seven-figure incomes, perks, and deference, they are shocked to find themselves an unsellable commodity in a business environment where youth pulls far more points than wisdom. Although those over 50 are taking longer to get a new job in this current Great Recession, new college grads are unable to find work and may be come our “lost” generation, our lost brain power.

The Good News, and the Bad

There are many reasons we seek to change our lives. It could be encountering harsh realities as we age, or a profound thirst to discover greater meaning, adventure, or financial freedom. Professional reinventions go hand in hand with personal reinventions. That’s both the good news and the bad. It’s not an intellectual process, but one of mind body and soul.

Before undertaking a reinvention, assess carefully:

- where you are
- where you want to go
- why you want to go there
- what’s really important to you

Professional reinventions go hand in hand with personal reinventions. That’s both the good news and the bad. It’s not an intellectual process, but one of mind body and soul.

Then check your underlying assumptions for the emotional fault lines of unmet needs or overridden values:

- Are you simply bored?
- Does the grass look greener “over there”?
- Are you following a societal dictate?
- Are you doing what others expect?
- Are you following your own heartfelt yearning?
- Have you checked in with your body lately, or is your mind rationalizing you into a new position that isn’t right for you?

You may have so many interests or options that you can’t immediately discern what you want; you may be so burned out that you can’t answer any of these questions; or you may feel so unnerved by losing your six-figure salary and now spending your days on the long-term unemployment line.

Reinvention is a process of personal evolution. There’s no magic wand; however, there are some pitfalls to avoid.

Reinvention most often backfires when:

- you fail to properly research what you think you want.
- you are lacking the inner resources required to fuel the change process.
- you begin following a road that is not on your map.

Are you a good candidate for reinvention, or are you a high risk?

How can you best prepare yourself for this process?

Delaying Tactics—The Cost of Self-Denial

It’s interesting, but most of us don’t think about what it will cost us if we don’t put our needs and values first. Thinking we can maintain the status quo, we often ignore the subtle warning signs, setting ourselves up for one or more of the following breakdowns. The longer you resist, the more significantly you’ll be affected by these self-denial symptoms:

- **Relationship Breakdowns:** Expect to burn out a marriage and/or lose people who are very important to you.
- **Physical Breakdowns:** Expect to be hit with chronic fatigue, female issues, back trouble, fibromyalgia, or pneumonia. Wherever you're physically vulnerable, you will be affected.
- **Spiritual Breakdowns:** Expect to experience confusion, internal churnings, disconnections, desperate yearnings, and fruitless seeking.

How Will You Cross the Divide?

Reinvention can be related to traversing a Grand Canyon of the Soul. Most people are so focused on what's happening in the moment, they don't see the warning signs and drive straight into the void, crashing and burning when they hit bottom. Others take the long route, painstakingly clambering down one side, trekking across the interior plains, and scaling the opposite cliff, inch by torturous inch. Some sail in by parachute, a tool that will help them progress quickly through the initial stages of their journey, but they are still left with a climb at the other side. A few will study the situation, hire an architectural engineer to design a bridge for them, then contract a builder to create it, and finally, hire a guide to take them across. What option will you choose?

Reinvention is a highly individual,
personal process, but you don't have
to go it alone

Following are the key tasks and stages that need to be addressed and progressed through as you reinvent yourself. You can choose to undertake this journey alone, and backpack it across the divide, or you can choose to light your path with support and guidance. Reinvention is a highly individual, personal process, but you don't have to go it alone.

Key Tasks of Reinvention

1. Assess where you are.
2. Determine what you want/where you're headed.
3. Test your goals/research your destination.
4. Overlay what you've learned in #2 and #3 against what you think you want—then take it all back to #2 and rework it, preferably with the help of a certified coach or a mentor.

5. Investigate non-work-related options (social, family, etc.) that will also fulfill your evolving values and needs.
6. Incorporate findings from #4 and 5 and overlay the grids again. Notice how your evolving future map affects you at all levels, emotional, intellectual, and spiritual.
7. Choose to either follow this course or continue with your research.
8. Take action, trusting that this is your path, but don't trust blindly. Stay awake and alert as you move ahead.
9. Consistently and continuously reassess and reevaluate where you're going/what you're doing/how it feels.

Remember, this is not a linear journey; it's a multi-dimensional experience. Now let's begin our discussion of each of the reinvention principles, culled from years of creating change and greater futures for clients and companies. They include:

- Always Add Value
- Trust the Process
- Leverage Change
- When the Door Opens, Go through It
- Respond—Don't React
- Hold the Vision and Don't Let Go
- Recalibrate Often

In the next chapters, we'll break down these principles and how they apply to your life—and the visionary future you have ahead of you.

Chapter 3

Principle 1

Always Add Value

The ability to reinvent a greater life is resident within each of us. Each moment is an opportunity for expanded joy, wealth, and impact. Too many of us miss these moments because we are sound asleep with the TV still running, lulled by the ping of incoming emails, and numbed by the buzz of the cell phone 24/7.

*Did I work on the battlefield?
Did I do what I thought was right?
Did I do all that I could?
Did I love all that I should?
To everyone in my sight?
What did I do with my life?
Did I exercise giving?
Did I work on the battlefield?
Did I do what I thought was right?
Did I do all that I could?
Did I love all that I should?
To everyone in my sight?
What did I do with my life?
Did I exercise giving
And forgiveness with all my might?
Did I honor my freedom
And did I live in the light?
Did I cherish my moments?
Did I take a good enough bite?
What did I do with my life?*

~Lenny Kravitz
“What Did I Do With My Life?”

We all have to wake ourselves up now and again. The surest way to do that is to ask yourself if you are always adding value. Or are you riding a “dead horse”?

Most of us have had times in our lives where we found ourselves riding a dead horse or two. So it's critical for both outstanding performance and having a great life that we take a hard look at our current conditions and ask ourselves if we need to ride a new horse or just change saddles.

Changing Saddles

The heat is on these days for those of us in business. Many are feeling the pinch of lost or dying industries, the devastating effects of the Great Recession, and tremendous pressure to constantly improve performance against new competition.

*Success means we go to sleep at night
knowing that our talents and abilities
were used in a way that served others.*

~Marianne Williamson

Our family-owned business faces these same issues. We had to decide whether to ride our dying horse to its last breath or to change saddles. But first we had to take a hard look at what our business encompasses, whom it serves, and what's working or not.

We decided we must change saddles; that is, we changed our approach because our traditional product line's heyday is fast disappearing. Manufacturing overseas has created a shrinking U.S. customer base. This is no surprise. It's a reflection of entire U.S. industries being shaken down.

Fortunately we realized in time that we were riding a dying horse.

We examined our existing business to determine if it had any life left in it or if it could be resuscitated. The old 80/20 rule was quite apparent. (Actually this ratio was updated by my late mentor, Dr. W. Edwards Deming, to 95/5.) For those of you unfamiliar with this rule, it applies to almost every expenditure of energy, effort, money, and so on. For example, we found that 80–95% of our revenues were coming from 5 to 20% of our customer base. As is usually the case, the remaining percentage of our customers were the ones we least enjoyed and sapped our resources. We had to either get off the old horse and find a new one, or try another saddle. Or both.

That's what we are doing. We are focusing our mature business to add the most value and jettisoning the rest that continues to perform at unacceptable standards. We enticed our 34-year-old high-powered daughter to join the firm and to launch a start-up company around an exciting new product line for our existing valued customers as well as for a new, untapped, growing customer base.

Clearly this solution represents another saddle and another way of riding the same horse. For our business, it is the only way to ride out the change and do well.

I could write a whole book on what all of this means for our economy and our everyday quality of life. Let it suffice to say that those who put Always Adding Value first and foremost will be the winners in the race to greatness. I could rave on and on about how Nordstrom knows what it's doing and won't lose me as a customer or about Gourmet Garage, a local retailer in Manhattan where service and quality are unbeatable. This top-of-the-line store is nothing like my local country market, where the veggies look like they're about to keel over, and the traditional conglomerate supermarkets can't even compare.

Adding value isn't always about products and services. It needs to be a key driver in all aspects of our lives—from the boardroom to the bedroom.

Flying cross-country recently, I was surprised to find Continental Airlines had a focus on me, with employees who smiled and appeared to be enjoying their jobs. United, goodbye! Let's not forget Staples, once the savior of all small business, and Bed, Bath & Beyond, the ultimate solution store for homeowners. Now Staples has far too few staff working its floors and BB&B doesn't have the quality reputation of its early years. I can't forget Sears! Their appliances division vs. our local appliance dealer—not even a comparison. Our local store won't install or resolve problems post-delivery. Sure this is cost effective for them, but no value is added for the customer, that's for sure. I want someone to stand behind what I buy from them.

Adding value isn't always about products and services. It needs to be a key driver in all aspects of our lives—from the boardroom to the bedroom.

We may see ourselves as “together” folks who know what we want and even have it all, but each of us needs to unfailingly double check our Quality of Life Quotient (QLQSM). Ask yourself constantly and consistently: Am I in a satisfaction range that fits what I want? Determine what needs to be discarded and what needs more value added for you to reach and sustain optimal satisfaction and live your greatness.

A pervasive theme I hear all too often is of pain and betrayal, disappointment, disillusionment, and discouragement. And people are exhausted from always being in overdrive. Many know better, but the challenges are coming even faster these days. We need more hope and action. We need more enlightened leadership. It starts with you and me.

When the New Saddle Doesn't Work, Get a New Horse!

My client, Dick, a division head, age 49, really believed in the product and mission of his company. A perfectionist, he drove everyone to the brink of depletion. Always under the gun himself, he demanded the impossible.

Yet growth was lackluster. His relationships with his team and colleagues were tenuous at best. Frustration mounting, he would yell more, even exploding on occasion. He'd come home, blasting his wife for anything that wasn't quite right. But try as she did, she was never sure what was wrong with him. He adored his kids, too, but had virtually no conversations with his daughter. When she became a teenager, she only grunted responses to him in passing queries.

He came to me to improve business results. What we uncovered was that his personal life was so enervating and frustrating that he couldn't be in his stride in either part of his life. His discontent seeped into his working relationships and kept him on edge. We worked on getting him refocused on what matters most and where he needed to put his efforts first and foremost.

At the same time, he took steps to rectify his marriage. First, he had to really be present. When that didn't work sufficiently, he went to couples counseling. Finally it was apparent that he was riding a dead horse. His life was passing by. It was time for him to change horses, or at least get off this dead one. In the process, my client learned that he had to contribute to all his relationships if he wanted to get extraordinary results and a Soul-fulfilling life.

Now that he has cleared out the debris that was holding him back, he is rockin'! Fast-forward: He leads the most profitable division in his company, enjoys his life fully, and even has more than two-sentence conversations with his daughter.

When you cease to make a contribution, you begin to die.

~Eleanor Roosevelt

Dana, an owner of a third-generation family business, which was a long-time giant in its industry, came to me wanting to ensure that her company would survive these challenging times. She described a board of outsiders and family members who were no longer adding value, if they ever had. Yet they all were dependent on the company coffers.

What we uncovered was that she wasn't feeling fulfilled. Guiltily she admitted that she'd been there, done that. It was time for her to ride a stallion of her own or just raise horses! When we uncovered family members of the board who were not adding value, we saw that in fact, they were standing in the way of forward momentum. Family tensions were high. It was a case of the old traditions in conflict with new thinking.

Dana had a choice: Simply change saddles and stay with the horse, or if that didn't work, change horses. Move ahead.

In the end, the family members were bought out. Dana created a new life with tons of fun time with her best buddy husband; she is financially secure while she invests and consults to other family-owned businesses.

Cutting our losses and changing horses may be the only answer.

When Changing Studs in the Bedroom Is Your Answer

Susan, age 34, is a leader in her field, with multiple advanced degrees and a high six-figure income. Success is her middle name. But when it comes to her love life, she is on a steep learning curve. Willing to do whatever it takes to change her living-together relationship into a marital one, she bent over backwards. In the process, she leaned more and more his way, slowly losing her Self once she entered his front door.

The new love glow disappearing, she didn't know why but she was just not happy. More and more, he let her know that she wasn't everything she could be or should be. Each day she was feeling less and less sure of herself. He was sure they didn't need to get married but could live together indefinitely. I was sure that she was on the way to becoming a Stepford Wife!

Always adding value is what leads to improving quality, positive growth, and continuous development. And that translates into receiving enormous added value in return.

Fortunately, during our coaching sessions, they saw that they had different agendas. As a result, value wasn't being added; it was being chipped away. They were nice people but just not a match for each other. Susan could have continued to stay, chipping away at who she was to become what he wanted. He would have lost respect in the end. This was a lose-lose deal.

Susan cut her losses and has since moved on. What she learned was that at work and at home, she deserved to be appreciated fully for who she is, and that it is her responsibility to ask and get what she wants or move on. Her rule of thumb is: If it doesn't add value, change how you are riding your horse. When that doesn't work, find a new horse.

Always adding value is what leads to improving quality, positive growth, and continuous development. And that translates into receiving enormous added value in return.

Whatever your situation, if your horse is dead or on its last breath, be sure to ask yourself: Is this situation adding value to me? What is keeping me from adding the value I can uniquely offer the world?

Chapter 4

Principle 2

Trust the Process

*Everything that happens to you is your teacher.
The secret is to learn to sit at the feet of your own life and be taught by it.*

~Polly B. Berends

*There are only two ways to live your life.
One is as though nothing is a miracle.
The other is as if everything is.*

~Albert Einstein

“**M**y struggle is how to stay focused and allow the process to work. It’s so easy for me to be able to go in so many directions. I feel myself drawn to my old ways of reacting, managing my life by objectives. But I know that’s fundamentally suicide to my psyche.” -Jane, 43 years old

“Everyone is telling me it’s a slam dunk. A must next step. It’s between me and a real numbers cruncher. I don’t know if I have a choice. But this new position is rife with dangers. I’d be reporting right to the top. But he’s a known terrorizer and chops people up like ice in a daiquiri. But if I don’t take it, I don’t know what’s coming next.” -Jim, 44 years old

Jane is just learning that if we push too hard, then we’ll surely miss out on life as it happens. When we are uni-focused on the end result not the process, it’s easy to get consumed, destined to get lost in the chaos. Then it’s even easier to just not be fully present, adding value, or creating the life we were meant to live.

Jim got “saved.” He didn’t take the high visibility job. After he pulled himself out of the running, he was relieved. That tells us something, doesn’t it?

I encouraged him to trust that the right and perfect match would come if he just kept showing up and stayed true to what matters most to him. I told him to trust the process.

What came through days after he let go is a far better scenario, with all the attributes Jim truly desired. Now he’s the top guy, and he can do it his way!

Everything I've learned from my work and studied from the Masters confirms the "rightness" of trusting the process.

Let me assure you that I am not suggesting you resign to a life of sitting under a tree while contemplating your navel and voila! the good life will be yours! Rather, I am proposing that understanding process and embracing change leads to peace and abundance.

Before we can talk about trusting the process, we have to agree on an operational definition of what a process is and how it relates to you, your life, your work, and our world.

Everything in our lives can be traced back to a process. Our very life is a process. Getting work done involves many processes.

If we step back and take a big picture view of our universe, everything that exists is a system. The earth and its solar system are organized around interdependent sub-processes and parts interacting toward a desired result. This is true of our bodies, business, the solar system. Everything.

The "divine force" that birthed us into existence works with energy and force fields that keep us magnetized together with just enough tension of the opposites to keep us in our planetary path.

Every system tends toward homeostasis or balance. Each of us is a self-correcting system, always seeking to right itself, to find center and balance. Always seeking to grow and develop toward wholeness.

For me, Luke Skywalker's "force" is the context for our times. It is what drives every process. It is our innate urge to evolve to a better, more improved version of who we are already.

So where does trust come into play? No one questions whether spring will follow the fallow days of winter, or summer will turn into vibrant autumn. Seasons are processes we've learned to expect, to trust they will return.

It is this same trust applied to all the processes of our life that I am suggesting. Applying this to our everyday lives and work, instead of desperately trying to control and exploit our life, we develop an attitude and response mechanism that collaborates with the dynamics of the very processes of life.

When we understand processes and how they work, we become alert to the direction in which the energy and movement are proceeding and cooperate with it.

Every system tends toward homeostasis or balance. Each of us is a self-correcting system, always seeking to right itself, to find center and balance.

I lovingly call this trusted awesome mystery the X factor. Carl Jung referred to it as synchronicity.

What's important for all of us to note is that each system and its processes has an aim, some goal or desired result. Otherwise it doesn't exist. And when we have complete faith in the universe of interconnected processes, we are able to surrender to these natural and organic forces, and this trust yields amazing results.

As Luke would say, "Go with the Force!"

Chapter 5

Principle 3 *Leverage Change*

*“Making every moment count.”
“Life is short.”
“It’s got to matter or why bother?”*

A pervasive craving for transcendence or wholeness is spreading like a viral epidemic. As early as 1990, Christina and Stanislav Grof, MD, PhD, forecasted what many of us would be experiencing as “spiritual bankruptcy” or “soul sickness,” precursors to the dark night of the soul that ushers in the dawn of healing and transformation.

This yearning for greater connection to Soul is a gift for each of us who is paying attention!

We’re taking the time to redefine what’s really important to us. Most of us, especially at midlife, are taking stock at every level. Everyone wants more meaning in their life and work. Don’t you?

We are in the early days of an epoch change. More of us are moving into our midlife passage and beyond than ever before. Each of us is being called into a self-renewal process.
As is our earth.

We all want our lives to matter because the reality of its brevity begins to sink in as we get older. We watch as relationships dissolve. We enter new stages of life as transitions shake us to our roots.

Joe, age 47, came to me because he wanted more intensity and vitality in life. “I’ve made it to the top. I have more money than I’ll ever need, but I feel like I am wasting my life doing work I could do blindfolded or give to someone else to do. I have a great wife and all the toys. Now I want to live a life of value and creativity, to give back.”

Just going to work every day to pay the bills or save for retirement isn’t the answer for most of us anymore. So many of us have strived throughout our youth, driven by extrinsic rewards. We relied on acquisition to make us feel good. However, at midlife many of us find the “wizard” of big bucks and corner offices is no big deal. And there’s no yellow brick road to the land of peace and abundance. Suddenly almost everything we’ve been about no longer holds meaning.

We fall into the “Canyon of the SoulSM.” Sometimes it seems there is no getting out. However, the descent is a self-renewal process that brings deepening and leaps of consciousness, opening us to profound

connections with nature and attunement to the creative energies of the universe. This leads ultimately to a fuller expression of one's deeper potential.

A 55-year-old second-generation family-business owner exclaimed during one of our recent sessions, "Oh my G-d, I just got it ... I have less time before me with my wife than we have behind us. We have got to change how we are doing things!"

The timing couldn't be more perfect.

We are in the early days of an epoch change. More of us are moving into our midlife passage and beyond than ever before. Each of us is being called into a self-renewal process. As is our earth.

*Almost 50% of the U.S. population is now over 40!
By 2020, 78% will be over 50!*

(Census 2010)

*The 50 and older population from 2000-2050 will grow at a rate
68 times faster than the rate of growth for the total population*

(Beyond Workforce 2020, Hudson Institute)

Psychologists Jung, Erickson, and Neugarten left us developmental models and associated tasks to track our growth as we move through our life course. Anyone 38 or older is in what Erikson described as the last two seasons of life. Since the majority of our citizenry in developed countries is over 35, this is important in understanding our times and what moves us to action.

However, the paradigm is not only shifting for midlifers. Younger and younger people are seeing through the empty promises of a life that is only profit-driven and is not aimed at the betterment of others and the higher good. A hot-shot 33-year-old adamantly told me that he was going into his own business because he didn't want to play by the "not having a life" rules and wants more time for himself and his young family. In their book *Midlife Crisis at 30*, Lia Macko and Kerry Rubin examine the process of self-evaluation that is taking place by younger and younger adults. And the Great Recession only exacerbates this dilemma.

Research confirms that accomplished and affluent Americans and Europeans in the post-9/11 era have become more intent on adding value, seeking meaning and significance in their lives and work. Wisdom comes with greater reflection. Life planning, legacy making, and redrafting dreams become paramount.

These trends indicate a positive move forward, giving rise to a new, enlightened leadership.

If you don't know what the new social trends and memes are that are moving through your customer and employee base, how are you ever going to keep up with the perceived and real needs of either group? (Much less your own!)

With discontinuous change accelerating, we have to be ahead of the curve, tracking new memes, noting when they reach critical mass. It's either ride the wave or die.

You must stay open to these fast-moving viral shifts if you are to get or best your intended results.

We as visionaries-in-the-making and visionary leaders on the cutting edge must create opportunities for our employees or clients, our community, and loved ones to feel valued, to be part of the process. Each of us is age-appropriately seeking significance. The highest rung on psychologist's Abraham Maslow's hierarchy of needs is self-actualization. With our basic needs met, we yearn to reach for more, for transcendence.

Most of our leaders, at the helm of our most powerful corporations and governments, are in midlife, in one of these last two seasons. Yet current findings show that the Silver CeilingSM is alive and well. A recent study of 800 CEOs revealed that these top leaders, all in midlife or beyond, reported back that we peak by 43! Being over 40 was the death knell.

Instead, I believe that we have a monumentally rich possibility: We in these last two seasons can fuel the movement toward meaning, significance, and midlife greatness. It requires each of us to Awaken the Visionary Within!

Understanding these models of successful aging and creative living against the backdrop of "finished by 40" makes it clear that we need a new paradigm as well as tools for midlife course correction. Baby Boomers always drive change. Now they drive a dissipative structural shift as they demand lives filled with significance.

With 10 trillion dollars in projected assets in the hands of Boomers and 50-plusers, they will hold financial control of the new paradigm. What a wonderful opportunity for the savvy leader and organization to leverage this knowledge! By championing greatness, visionaries-in-the making along with visionary leaders will trigger transformation and innovation the likes of which we have never seen—and which we desperately need. Fostering greatness in our schools, at home, and in the workplace is what will empower us to stay ahead of the curve, to retain our lead as innovators, and to model democracy.

By championing greatness, visionaries-in-the making along with visionary leaders will trigger transformation and innovation the likes of which we have never seen—and which we desperately need.

For this new paradigm to take hold, each of us will be required to do our own Soulwork. Now is the time to bring forth our hidden SoulSpeakSM to ensure that each of us voices what needs to be said, our core truths, to move us from an outmoded command & control system to one built on enlightened leadership and the greatness within each of us. Then, and only then, can we truly demonstrate that the whole is greater than the sum of its parts.

*The first step is transformation of the individual. This transformation is discontinuous ...
The individual, transformed, will perceive new meaning to his life,
to events, to numbers, to interactions between people.*

~Dr. W. Edwards Deming

History proves that even in the worst of times, we've always been supported toward our long-term betterment. It's not easy. In fact, it's tough and sometimes painful. That is the way of breakdowns into breakthroughs. As reported by Jungian analyst John Perry, who coined the term "renewal process," there is profound meaning and order to the processes of transformation. Things may seem like they are falling apart, but there is the possibility for healing and restoration.

To paraphrase Buckminster Fuller, I refer to this as "emergence through emergency."

My client, a 57-year-old married, brilliant international dealmaker, tells me: "Whoever thought at this time of life we'd be living from paycheck to paycheck? I've planted so many new seeds. Any of them taking hold will bring us great rewards. In the old days I'd just keep barreling forward ... steam rolling whatever lay in my way to getting things to happen. Now I know better. I have to wait. So much of all this is 'luck,' 'destiny,' and as you say, 'trusting the process.'"

The key learning for us, especially at midlife, is to allow life to happen, recognizing that many of the transitions taking place to us personally are also happening large scale. Those of us who are astute will trust the process in front of us and leverage today's powerful changes into new opportunities for tomorrow.

Chapter 6

Principle 4

When the Door Opens, Go through It

A problem adequately stated is a problem well on its way to being solved.

~R. Buckminster Fuller

Last weekend, I spent a lazy humid August evening with dear friends to say goodbye to summer. We all gathered outside on the genteel front porch, surrounded by splashes of outrageous color and wafting fragrances from their lovingly tended perennial gardens. Each of us was either an ex-hippie or on the early edge of Baby Boomerhood and now mainstream and highly accomplished. Some of us were parents with adolescent kids, others brand new or seasoned empty-nesters, coupled and single along with a recent widower. All of us were hunkering into midlife.

*Time, Time, Time,
See what's become of me
While I looked around for my possibilities.*

~Simon And Garfunkel
“A Hazy Shade Of Winter”

Our conversations floated from one thing to another and finally to what's next for us. Each of us piped in our two cents.

All of us were feeling that the clock was ticking. Each of us wanted to beat that clock or remove its hands. Like Ulysses' sirens, all our “I wants” became shrill shrews demanding attention right now! The consensus: Everything looks so risky and getting more so every day. We all laughingly agreed that it would be so great to just float away on a cruise and come back when everything was all decided.

The reality is that most of us are asking the same life-altering questions as we stand at the precipice of change: “How do I make decisions now since I don't know who I'm going to be by then or what the world will be like by then?”

The “then” timeframe for some encompasses the next two to five years, and for others, ten to fifteen. But what is the same for all is that these midlife questions range from the more profound, “Why am I here? Is this all there is?” to the more fundamental practical concerns about where to go next in career- and life-planning terms.

- *When do I step down and pass the baton?*
- *What’s my new passion?*
- *Should I join some company boards, or rev up and start a new business?*
- *Can I afford to downshift?*
- *Is this the relationship I want now?*
- *How do I turn my empty nest into a launching pad?*
- *How do I make a lasting impact?*

Living Betwixt & Between

Just as in adolescence, most of us are teetering between in control and out of control. Each what if? requires a multitude of compromises and leads to more complicated scenarios without obvious answers. Like a childhood ride, around and around we go. It’s dizzying. There are lots of questions and too many choices. And there are so many obstacles in the way.

Caught in the middle zone, although reluctant to admit it out loud, we are confronted with the tremendous terror of not knowing. The million-dollar question is: How do we live in between?

The only answer: In the center of the tension. Somehow we have to find a middle ground. And wait it out.

This is a place I know so very well. As a self-proclaimed Midlife Diva, I enter into this space as a matter of course as clients seek new on-ramps, change lanes, and shift gears on the road to midlife greatness and new destinations.

My own visits to the center of the maelstrom remind me that each new life cycling brings us back into the “life is good” phase. But once there, it’s so easy to get comfy. Too much so. In my youth, the inflation of success was so intoxicating. I loved the adrenaline high fueling my certainty that I had this nailed. I was on top of the world.

Caught in the middle zone, although reluctant to admit it out loud, we are confronted with the tremendous terror of not knowing. The million-dollar question is: How do we live in between?

This is a place within, where it's okay
to not know yet. That's where real
clarity is birthed.

This phase's arrogance blindsides us. Once again we fall totally out of touch with the other end of the continuum: Where things may look inescapable, and apathy reigns, and you want to give up ... can't find your way. The other side of arrogance can be excruciating self-doubt, emptiness, disconnection from life's greater mysteries. I

pray this is not our destiny as the "developed world" tumbles into the Great Divide in our world's chaotic Great Recession.

Caught in the throes of an inner life-death struggle, we prefer not to take the curves, but rather hold on to what we know and have. So many of us take the slow lane, driving within the speed zone, only to find ourselves stuck in first gear, heading right smack into mediocrity. Stagnation. Entropy.

*Yeah, we're headed for a new place.
A step at a time.
We're gonna take a long ride.
Time don't wait around forever.
We've got to do it right now.
Let's do it all together.*

~Neil Diamond
"Headed for the Future"

Just like the life cycle of a business, our lives follow a recurring pattern: One phase follows the next, in time. We either have to change, recycle, or die on the side of the road.

Recently I found myself like a deer in headlights, not sure which way to go. My husband and I were grappling with where to live and work next. So many directions fascinated us. We wanted to be with our children, who are spread across the country from east to west. I craved the country, needing to be in nature, yet the action is in the city. New doors were opening to take my work to the next level. I was pregnant with possibilities.

Fortunately, I knew better: I had to stay in the center of the maelstrom and wait it out. And I had to sit in my worst fears. I knew that if I resisted, my fear would manifest even more. Instead of staving off the fear of not knowing with my favorite numbing tricks (filling myself with an extra helping of carbs, obsessing over roads not taken, buying something I probably don't need), I had to instead find a safe middle ground. This is a place within, where it's okay to not know yet. That's where real clarity is birthed.

Lots of opportunities that appeared to be right up my alley were beginning to show up. It would have been so easy to speed ahead. Yet any premature movement toward resolution, rushing the process, is a "subtle self violation" as visionary and teacher Dr. Richard Moss would say.

As is true for all of us, as I get closer to a breakthrough—the aha! moment—the ante gets upped. I needed a fix! That was just the time to outsource for support and objectivity. I called a dear friend and colleague, and she reminded me to be delicate with myself. And to make friends with my fears of not knowing just yet.

We must stay open to what shows up, although it may look like a detour. It may very well be our destiny honking.

Thankfully, I was forced to acknowledge my own hunger for ready answers and unease with not knowing. I reminded myself that this too would pass. Clarity would return. But while I waited, my task was to keep striving for greater consciousness, stretching to unleash my greatness.

Detours or Destinies?

The bumble bee is an example of this principle in nature: It flies parallel to the flowers below, heading in a determined direction. Then, it turns perpendicular to its original path, only to find the nectar it was seeking. As we all know, it's so easy to be totally focused on the goal in front of us, and we are so wary of being sidetracked, that we miss the most important side roads. These show up as messengers pointing the way to our desired destination.

Now more than ever, it is critical that we remain flexible and adaptable, making friends with change and not knowing. This is our time to resource, preparing for a new phase or a totally new cycle. Each of us must be extra vigilant now to be personally accountable. Invite change and embrace transformation.

All we have to do is stay in motion. That's the key to longevity! But we must remember that heading into action without clarity is dangerous. Otherwise we may miss the gift of what Bucky Fuller (one of our country's greatest 20th-century visionaries) coined as a "right angle precession." Tracing patterns in nature, Fuller uncovered a new truth: We must stay open to what shows up, although it may look like a detour. It may very well be our destiny honking.

To avoid making the wrong turn or aborting the trip altogether, we need proper assessment tools, knowledge, and experience to make distinctions. And if we are really savvy travelers, we can take the hairpin turns without destroying what matters most.

Most of all, we must trust that the forces acting on our behalf have just not yet resolved in a specific direction. When they do, our answers will be so obvious! Doors will open. People will appear. And once we have that degree of certainty, our resolve will drive us through the gates to a greater future! When the door opens then, go right through it!

Chapter 7

Principle 5

Respond—Don't React

*Life is not the way it's supposed to be.
It's the way it is.
The way you cope with it is what makes the difference.*

~Virginia Satir

Gridlock & Turning the Key: Responding

Even if we have charted a carefully designed course, and have created a perfect vision for ourselves, it is inevitable that things will cross our path that will challenge us. That is why it is critical we learn to respond rather than react.

Just as we need to cultivate the art of waiting and trusting the process until the right door opens, we also need to cultivate the art of response rather than reaction.

Caught in the grips of gridlock all along Park Avenue, as remnants of Katrina dump torrential rains on Manhattan, I give up worrying about getting to my meeting on time. Letting the cabbie do the driving, I drift from a soggy Park Avenue to the state of the world, then onto what I will write for this next principle.

Jolting me out of reverie, a near-homeless man starts ranting and raving, pointing threateningly at my cabbie and the hood of the taxi. The light changes. Folks hurriedly maneuver to get by the bumper-to-bumper cars with umbrellas turned inside out. But we're not going anywhere with this guy smack in the center of the intersection. In a flash of ancient body shifting, my cabbie instinctively readies to fight until the death.

Not needing a knight in shining armor, I hear myself say to his image in the rear view mirror, "It's not worth it. It doesn't matter. Let it be." Just as quickly, my cabbie pulls it together. We both smile as he looks over his shoulder at me. Turning back, he lets this crazy-making guy continue across the street. I laugh to myself, "Now, *he* is my hero." Unwittingly, my cabbie plays out this month's principle:

Respond—Don't React.

We've all been there. Some triggering remark, even just body language alone, and voila! Instantly we are back on the school playground or around our childhood kitchen table. Whether at work or at home, here or around the globe, all our ancestral and learned fight-or-flight reactive modes come into action. Thank goodness we have them. Let's save them for when we really need to stand up and protect ourselves.

We must remember that it's not what happens that matters; it's how we respond that makes the real difference.

Reactivity: The Mode of Choice These Days

Unfortunately, we all go into a reactive mode rather easily. It takes a lot of vigilance and practice to disengage from old destructive patterning, especially when it is so deeply rooted in our soma, right down to the cellular level.

Every altercation, challenge, and unexpected change is a call to attention, a mini wake-up call. We must remember that it's not what happens that matters; it's how we respond that makes the real difference. In every situation, we have the opportunity to make a new choice or revisit others made previously. Sometimes all it takes is to step out of the situation and take a big picture view. Then, listening to that voice inside, we'll know how to respond.

From the current state of the globe, it appears that reactivity is the mode of choice. Win-lose the preferred outcome.

The Arab Spring is overflowing with demonstrations, strikes, rallies, and marches—some using social media to organize. Many have been met with violence. These reactions are reminiscent of the discontent that fostered Nazi Germany. None of us are immune to outbursts of suppressed rage. It could happen in any city or community where there are extremes of “haves” and “have nots.” Is Watts, Appalachia, West Harlem, or the poor of the Gulf Coast any different? Yet we let these situations fester in our own midst. We take action only when the veils of denial are ripped away.

In New Orleans, and the rest of the Gulf Coast, we built where we didn't belong. We were forewarned that the levees wouldn't hold, but they weren't replaced. We knew there'd be destruction, loss, and even death. Yet there were no plans for mass transportation of evacuees or ample supplies of medicines, food, and water in place for those who reached “safety.” If there was a plan, it either wasn't used or never strenuously tested. This totally trounced the scout's fundamental motto: Be prepared!

Learning to Respond: A Far-Sighted View

Most of us are not very good at responding to what really needs our attention. Much of the time, we are pulled by current emergencies rather than taking care of our basic infrastructure and planning for our

desired better future. Part of good preparation is to know where we are headed, what our options are in the present, and which ones will impact our probable future. Whether you are at the helm of a multinational corporation or a family-owned business, or planning your next career move, current trends can provide key indicators for your actions and future success.

Perhaps most imperative is that we all do a situation analysis routinely, assessing our current and prospective alternatives, re-evaluating our priorities and plans, self-correcting on the go. Otherwise, if we don't pay attention, our uninformed choices or lack of planning can come back to haunt us.

Throughout the past few years, we've been hit with one natural disaster or pandemic after another: tsunamis, hurricanes, earthquakes, tornados ... swine flu, H1N1, and the return of illnesses once thought nearly eradicated, such as whooping cough and small pox. Why haven't we been funding these global prevention and response efforts of the highest priority? Where have we been as a nation, much less the world community? Apparently we've been caught with our pants down ... again.

So here we are again reacting versus responding. We find ourselves unprepared as new threats come into our field of vision, test our framework, and challenge our worldview. We can't stay asleep at the wheel or react impulsively if we are to thrive.

The only way to counteract the escalating fear and pervasive anxiety is to be prepared and informed. Otherwise we leave ourselves open to knee-jerk reactions. Clearly every town, institution, and household needs a plan and routine testing of our ability to respond proactively. Perhaps its time to morph our fire drills into an all-purpose drill to respond to emergencies.

We are continually in reaction to whatever is loudest or hurts the most. Current events are only reflections of our own lives and our out-of-balance way of life.

I'm not suggesting we go back to the 1950s mentality of bomb shelters and air-raid drills. But do you know what to do should an emergency confront us? I sure don't. But then again, I bought duct tape and plastic sheeting for my windows post-9/11 at the urging of Homeland Security. My family and I would have suffocated from the lack of oxygen!

Modus Operandi: Putting Out Fires & Affixing Band-Aids

*The way we see events approaching us affects the way we respond to them;
the way we respond to them affects the way we regard ourselves;
and this in turn affects the way we see new events.*

~W. Timothy Gallwey

On the world stage, we aren't looking like a great model to emulate these days: We've botched the handling of disasters on our own coastlines, yet again exposing the disparity between our own "haves" and "have nots." We're sinking in the worldwide rankings for technical smarts and basic skills, being outperformed by the youth of developing countries. Now compounding all this, we are repeatedly unprepared for pandemics, nor able to protect our own from natural disasters.

All of this telecasts to our enemies and those we wish to win over. This is not what I was thinking of when it comes to transparency and accountability. I scratch my head in amazement.

It's the same thing with all of us. Our modus operandi is to put out fires or affix Band-aids. Most of us are on automatic pilot as we rush through our life and our years. We race against some unseen time piece and lose sight of the road. Just check your planner or iPad, which is completely overscheduled. Out of whack. We are continually in reaction to whatever is loudest or hurts the most. Current events are only reflections of our own lives and our out-of-balance way of life.

Apparently we've fallen asleep at the wheel of a good life. Or perhaps disillusioned, we've veered off the road into the ditch of reactivity. So what do we do now? Who are our role models? What are the new rules of the road?

First Responders: It Is Possible

On the 10th anniversary of 9/11, Mayor Bloomberg and Commissioner Kelly were truly first responders in the face of a potential terrorist attack in New York City's transit system. They studied the situation, gathering and evaluating data. They were ready for such a possibility. I don't know if they had a full-fledged plan or if they'd had sufficient practice runs. But they appeared to move smoothly and quickly into action.

New York's leaders demonstrated the epitome of first respondership: Stay on top of change; perform frequent situation analysis; examine the facts, trends, and patterns; use your instincts; trust your gut; and take considered and timely action.

If we all get clear on what we want our future to be, and are prepared, it will be far easier to know when and how to respond. As first responders in our own lives and as responsible citizenry, we all need to take stock frequently. Revising plans, updating guidelines, and revitalizing commitments should be standard in the office, at school, and at home. At every stage and age, as leaders and innovators, we need tools, skills training, and up-to-date knowledge to guide us.

But sometimes like my cabbie and me, we are called to respond on the spot. This is when all our training and inner knowing come into play. Responsiveness wins over reactivity in every instance.

Chapter 8

Principle 6

Hold the Vision and Don't Let Go

*Ours is an era of quantum change,
the most radical deconstruction and
reconstruction the world has seen.*

~Jean Houston

Jaw-Dropping Times: Overwhelm and Turbulent Change

I've heard from so many who are deeply and rightly blown away by the current state of affairs in our world right now. No surprise today's headlines read:

Terror Attacks, War, Recession Compete with Disasters for Headlines Around the World

In these jaw-dropping times of overwhelming challenges and turbulent change, it is easy to fall into resignation and hopelessness or turn away into abject denial, seeking to turn back the hands of time to what we suppose was a gentler era.

But this year, it is important to remember that it is possible to bring light and hope in a world of darkness, oppression, and despair.

A New World of Our Making

Each of us, together, must have some abiding principles or tenets, be they the Ten Commandments of Moses or your own personal "rules of the road" that will guide you when the chips are down or the going gets tough. And it will get tougher and rougher!

Live on—live on as if you had centuries!

~Carl Jung

These are awesome times, testing all we have to offer. But how are the tests of these times different than those of the past?

The greatest gift of these times
of epoch change has been the call
to our greatness.

Relatively speaking, World Wars I and II rank up there with the Iraqi war or Vietnam. We've had epidemics and natural disasters in the past, so what's the big deal? The difference is that now the earth is in jeopardy, as is as our way of life. What we've done is up the ante to the max.

There are days I just want to give up, when my doubts loom larger than life. I get hooked on what isn't yet here, instead of focusing on what's here now. (You know the feeling?) It's like gunning the motor while stepping on the brake with the other foot! But I'm reminded that this is our time to make a sustainable difference. We're needed—that is all we can be sure of.

So full speed ahead into the future.

My newest refrain is: "I'm still standing after all this time!" Like the Energizer bunny, I keep rebounding because I truly believe we are being prepared to withstand and survive even greater stress and testing on all fronts. We are either en route to an evolutionary dead end, where everything we've known and held true is up for grabs, or we'll ride these future trends into a new world of our making.

The greatest gift of these times of epoch change has been the call to our greatness. Sometimes the call is so silent, it is barely perceptible except to the trained ear. Other times, it shakes us up like a cacophonous horn blowing for all the world's souls to come to attention.

Remember that we who are entering, in the midst of, or leaving our rich middle years have the responsibility to be the new visionary leaders for the 21st century. We must be the new messengers, teachers, and transformers co-creating a better tomorrow ... today. As history tells us, change agents always deepen their culture and leave a legacy for future generations by confronting the difficulties of their times with invention, insight, and transcendent understanding.

Now in midlife, most of us have acquired the wisdom as well as thirst for authentic expression that makes for new and enlightened leadership. It is our time to hold a new vision and not let it go!

Chapter 9

An Exercise in Creating Vision

Do This Exercise to Create a Clear Vision for Your Greater Future ... And Then Don't Let Go!

In the last chapter, I discussed the importance of holding onto a vision no matter what. However, this is not possible without having a clear picture of your greater future.

Knowing what you want to achieve and how you want to live will ensure that you direct your time and resources toward solving the right problems, making spot-on choices, and implementing the right action plans. Many times what starts as a vision for merely improving our own lives ends up being a vision for us all.

Remember that this is your game plan. Be sure to include only your ideas in your own words. To get to the essence, use keywords and short phrases to respond. Spend as much time as you want responding and revising. Once you are satisfied, share this with whomever will be affected by your new road map or sharing the journey.

1. First, answer these questions:

- What do I want my life to look like in 3–5 years?
- What is a day in my life like in the future?
- How will I be spending my time, with whom, and where?
- What do I need to transform or work on today to get there?

2. Develop a list of key measurable success criteria that you will be tracking to know how well you are doing and what needs adjusting.

3. Determine each major action or task plan that has to be accomplished this year, broken down by quarter with due dates and assignees. Make sure you are focusing on what needs to get changed or improved upon to reach your desired end goal.

What did you discover during this exercise? After fleshing out the details, did you find that your true vision is different than what you thought it was? Or did you only confirm what you've always known about yourself and where you want to head? Perhaps the most important question of all—Does your vision excite you? Will it sustain you through the obstacles and mundane tasks en route to making it reality? If not, try the exercise again and be honest with yourself about what you really want, not what you think you should want.

If your vision does move you, then read on to learn how to stay focused and on track no matter what life throws your way.

Chapter 10

Principle 7 *Recalibrate Often*

*How does it feel To be on your own
With no direction home
Like a complete unknown
Like a rolling stone ?*

~Bob Dylan

No Direction Known? Keeping Checking the Compass

Everyone wants long-term success. But it is elusive for most.

First Solar is a perfect example of a complete lack of foresight and inability to recalibrate. After the federally funded Solyndra received half a billion dollars in stimulus money, it went bankrupt, and First Solar shares abruptly dropped. The U.S. government lost sight of the playing field and reality, wanting to go green but not paying attention to the details.

Long-term success is dependent on knowing where you are now and where you are headed. Then closing the gap.

Frequently.

Continuously.

Whether it's your business, your career, or your life at home, it's easy to get off track, lose touch, spin out, or get buried under. Without a true sense of where you are in the moment, it is impossible to realize your dreams or be a leader in your field.

Recalibrate with Profound Knowledge

The only way we can take 100% responsibility for sustaining our success is to keep recalibrating—in every aspect of our lives and organizations.

Key to successful recalibration is to acquire what my dear departed mentor Dr. W. Edwards Deming coined as Profound Knowledge. This umbrella phrase emphasizes understanding change and how to measure it, being aware of emerging trends and shifts, and learning how to apply this knowledge to leading and sustaining long-term success. This is the critical key to becoming your own Everyday Futurist and visionary-in-the-making!

Profound Knowledge emphasizes understanding change and how to measure it, being aware of emerging trends and shifts, and learning how to apply this knowledge to leading and sustaining long-term success.

Bottom line: If we don't acquire profound knowledge, we cannot know how to prepare for and leverage coming change; thus, we don't know how to sustain our success.

Understanding change means understanding shifts in our personal world as well as tracking trends that may capsize us, overtake us, or cause us to flounder.

Learning the Hard Way

Unfortunately, one of my Gen X male clients learned this the hard way. A rising star in his field and recently married, he was planning for a great future with children, tons of time for fun, and all the trappings of success. Then suddenly, the rug got pulled out from under him. His happy homemaker wife fled, saying, "I'm out of here!"

Somewhere along the way, there was a breakdown or perhaps many small fissures below the surface. Had they been recalibrating and checking in with each other, communicating the truth of what was so for each of them, perhaps they could have saved their marriage or at least ended it with love, grace, and forgiveness.

Even in the most secure relationships, unexpected change ruffles our plans. A recently returned-to-work mother of teenagers reported that her new career was now going gangbusters, and she no longer worried about the empty nest. But the new ripple in her life was that her once very successful husband, in his late 40s, now faced an unknown future. Surprised by shifts in his industry, "suddenly" he and his business partner were facing the probability of closing their doors. What once appeared to be a sure path to their dreams was now crumbling beneath them.

When Is Enough ... Enough?

Most of us are going so fast, we are on automatic pilot. Always going for more ... more ... more. But when we are asked why we want to achieve more, most of us turn to old criteria, much of it not completely relevant anymore. Wrote Ellen Glasgow, "A tragic irony of life is that we so often achieve success ... after the reason for which we sought it has passed." For some, the old success criteria have no more bearing in current markets, relationships, or scenarios. Other criteria just need tweaking.

A very successful professional in his mid-fifties was telling me about how thrilled he was to have been able to expand his revenues and client base exponentially. As he shared his new plans for growth, it became clear to me that he was going for the gold ring, but he already had it! I posed the hard question: “When will you have enough?”

What is true in the morning of one's life can be a lie in the afternoon.

~Carl Jung

Not surprisingly, he didn't have an immediate answer. Then the next phase of our work together began. Now he's recalibrating: He is recrafting the future he wants and what he really needs to sustain it.

Other clients, especially those movers and shakers who are nearing the end of their high-speed careers, are facing voids they never expected. For instance, a very successful entrepreneur, looking age 70 in the eye, recently decided to stop working. No financial questions, he was set. What he didn't do was plan for how to use all his newfound free time. He hadn't a clue. All he ever did was work, work, work. He regretted not developing other interests years ago. Now he has to play catch-up.

Keep the Edge with Future-Forward Thinking

Even if you are a major player in your industry or a leader in your field, recalibration is the name of the continuity game. Case in point: I am currently in the middle of untangling an internal security breach into my ISP account. You guessed it. They are the only game in town!

You don't have to be a fortune teller to effectively assess where you and your business are headed, but you do need to take the time to tell if there is, indeed, the fortune you seek in your future.

Customer service, from front-line up, has mishandled the problem. Yet they position themselves as a “quality-added” company with customer satisfaction a priority. Waiting in line at their main office to “prove” my identity, I heard other disgruntled customers closing their accounts for a variety of faux pas on the part of employees and representatives of the company.

I guess the company forgot two basic rules of thumb I'll paraphrase: (1) It takes one disgruntled customer to kill fifty potential new ones, and (2) it takes seven times the effort and expense to get a new customer than to retain an existing one.

If this company expects to sustain their competitive edge, they have to stay in touch with their customers, especially the disgruntled ones. It's time to recalibrate to be sure they are still in sync with those who keep them in business.

The same applies to all of us. If you want to sustain your success and quality of life, it's critical to recalibrate often to be sure you and your firm are still in sync with your personal vision for your own future and the longevity of the firm. Whatever needs fixin', fix it.

What I've found to be true for most of us is that if we future-forward our current situation into the probable future, we will be surprised at the outcome. It's when we close our eyes and go unconscious that we lose sight of what really matters. Then we go off track or lose our way.

Let's face it: Remaining ahead of the curve depends on frequent reality checks. You don't have to be a fortune teller to effectively assess where you and your business are headed, but you do need to take the time to tell if there is, indeed, the fortune you seek in your future. Only by continually recalibrating in your personal and professional life can you guarantee that you are in sync with the world around you, so you can make the changes that are going to make a difference.

Conclusion

As we reinvent the millennium, we have the momentous task of being true to ourselves, so that we are more able to meet the challenges of these difficult times. As we express our authentic selves and trust the process, add value, leverage change, walk through open doors, and respond by holding a vision and recalibrating, we will create much greater lives together.

The hunger for freedom and innovation that marked the sixties is coming alive again in response to the growing environmental, economic, and social crises of our times. Boomers are change-makers, and the time has come again to reinvent our lives and the world. Seize the moment to harness this powerful evolutionary energy and make a real difference.

You can join other forward-thinking and enlightened visionaries and visionaries-in-the-making, who are ready to learn more about unleashing their potential for greatness, on a FREE weekly call and guided forum, Awaken the Visionary WithinSM.

Join the conversation!

Here's to making your future great!



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Your Ultimate Guide to the Future