

FINDING THE RIGHT WORK AND MAKING A DIFFERENCE

Raymond Gerson



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By

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Introduction

This free ebook is comprised of articles that I previously wrote on the subjects of discovering the right vocation or appropriate careers for yourself, on finding a purpose that gives your life meaning and the value of making a positive contribution and difference for others.

These articles are also part of my Tumblr blog at <https://raymondgerson.tumblr.com> and I selected and organized them to align with the subject of this book.

Job satisfaction enhances life satisfaction. When you do work you enjoy, use your best aptitudes and talents, and feel you are making a contribution, all aspects of your life are favorably influenced. Feeling unhappy in a job or career has a negative effect on health, relationships, peace of mind and overall enjoyment of life.

I believe the answers to which careers are best for you are within you. You are likely to find these answers through a journey of self-discovery. It begins with self-knowledge. The biggest mistake most career seekers make is to look for a career before they look within and know themselves.

An individual mission is a calling or higher purpose that you feel inspired to fulfill. It may take the form of a career,

volunteer work, parenthood or a hobby. It is any worthwhile purpose for which you feel a deep sense of commitment and connection. A mission usually involves a cause you feel deeply about and uses talents that bring you joy. This will frequently result in your making a positive difference in the lives of others.

The book is divided into the following four sections:

Section One – Discover Your Right Vocations

Section Two – Building Expertise and Making Your
Dream Career Happen

Section Three – Finding Your Work Purpose and Mission

Section Four – Making a Positive Difference

About the Author

Raymond Gerson is the author of nine books including *Achieve College Success: Learn How in One Semester or Less* and *Achieve Career Success: Discover and Get the Job You Want* (full and condensed versions). Raymond has a Masters Degree in Psychology and he taught college and career success courses for fourteen years at Austin Community College in Austin, Texas. He is a former owner of an executive search and recruiting business, training specialist, career counselor and vocational rehabilitation counselor. Raymond has trained educators how to use his college and career success books in courses for their own students. His books are available at <https://www.upbeatpress.com> and information on his training programs can be found at www.collegereadinessstraining.com. He also has a website at www.raymondgerson.com.

SECTION ONE

Discover Your Right Vocations

“It is the first of all problems for a man
(or woman) to find out what kind of work
he (or she) is to do in the universe.”

Thomas Carlyle

Career Clues: Notice Activities That Make You Come Alive

What makes you light up? Which activities fill you with passion and enthusiasm? What energizes and inspires you? When do you feel most alive and happy? Do these activities provide any clues that might help you discover the right career?

What do I mean by light up? Here is an example. Many years ago I did part-time career counseling for the University of Texas (U.T.). One day a student came into the career center who was majoring in engineering. As she talked about engineering I observed that she seemed depressed. Her eyes were downcast, head was down, cheeks had no color, eyes had no sparkle and she sounded passionless. Later I asked her to tell me about something she did in high school that was enjoyable and that she did well. She recalled being a fund raiser and leader. She excelled at fund raising and enjoyed motivating others to high levels of achievement. Obviously, she had excellent people skills, leadership ability, public speaking skills and the ability to inspire and motivate others.

As she discussed her fund raising achievements she came alive. Color returned to her face, her eyes sparkled, she sat erect, her gestures became animated and she spoke with passion and enthusiasm. In the middle of a sentence she stopped speaking. There was pin drop silence. It was obvious from her expression that she was aware of the difference between herself when talking about engineering and the fund raising activities. She really got it! Then she said, "Oh my, I have moved away from my strengths." This student realized that by choosing engineering as her major she had moved away from using the skills that were her strengths and which she enjoyed using. At that point she decided to see a U.T. advisor to discuss changing her major to something more suitable and which would capitalize on her strengths.

As you reflect ask yourself, "What can make me light up like the U.T. student?"

Name three activities that have made you light up and come alive? What activities fill you with passion and enthusiasm when you think about or do them?

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

Now ask yourself what clues these activities reveal about careers that will bring you the same joy. Were there certain

talents and skills that you enjoyed using while performing these activities? What was it about these activities that made you feel such passion? Identify what makes you come alive, identify careers that contain some of these same elements, and you will discover a great vocation to pursue.

Listen to Your Life and Discover Work You Were Born to Do

“Is the life I am living, the same as the life that wants to live in me?” These are the words of Parker Palmer from his book, *Let Your Life Speak: Listening for the Voice of Vocation*.

Are you living your life based on “oughts” and “shoulds” or on what your life and inner voice are calling you to do? It is easy to fall into the trap of pursuing a career because you or others believe this is what you “ought” to do. And yet, to “follow your bliss” and to discover the work that you were meant to do, you must listen to your heart.

Parker Palmer spent years in vocations which were not aligned with his true nature and best talents. This resulted in his being depressed for many years of his life. Eventually he returned to teaching and helping educators. This work was in harmony with the life that wanted to be expressed through him. Greater job satisfaction and the ability to make a positive contribution were the result.

One of my college students was depressed and was self-sabotaging by missing classes and turning his school work in

late. For years he and others believed that he “should” become a nurse. More self-reflection helped him to realize that nursing would not be fulfilling for him. He had worked in hospitals before and did not enjoy it. Recalling the joy of being an athletic trainer’s assistant while in high school made him realize that he wanted to go in a different direction. For example, he remembered patching up the quarterback who went back into the game and scored the winning touchdown. This experience made him feel joy and a sense of purpose and accomplishment.

My student changed his college major and began pursuing the goal of becoming an athletic trainer. His depression disappeared, papers were turned in on time and he attended every class. He was inspired, happy, and self-motivated. His grades began to improve and he seemed like a different person.

This is an example of what can happen when you stop living your life according to “oughts” and begin living the life that wants to live in you. The clues to a career that is right for you are in your life. Let your life speak and then listen to your own inner voice. This is how you can discover the work you were born to do.

Reference:

1. Palmer, Parker. *Let Your Life Speak: Listening to the Voice of Vocation*. Jose Bass. 2,000.

Your Natural Gifts

You have natural gifts waiting for you to discover. Your talents and aptitudes are part of your gifts, and when shared, they can make a positive contribution to others. These gifts are integral to your nature and aligned with who you are. Through self-observation you can often realize the types of activities you are good at and enjoy the most. You can also become aware of your non-talents, limitations and activities you dislike. Once you are aware of your favorite gifts, then you can decide in which career(s) you want to use them.

Amy, who was one of my former students, is an example of someone who was aware of her gifts, but she was undecided about her college major and which career to pursue. Amy is a talented and skilled singer and song writer. She loves music, but she told me that she did not want to become a professional musician who entertains for the sake of entertaining. She mentioned to me that her strongest desire was to help people in need.

Amy also told me that she loved children and had enjoyed some of her psychology courses. I asked her if she would like to use her musical gifts to help others if it could

provide enough income. This idea appealed to her. I suggested to Amy that she investigate the field of Music Therapy which would allow her to use her musical gifts to help others.

After doing some research, Amy decided to major in Music Therapy. It was an excellent fit, she excelled as a student and she recently received her degree in Music Therapy from a university. Now she is ready to start her Music Therapy career. So the first step is to discover your natural gifts and then to decide how and where you want to use them.

A few years ago I wrote a poem called, “The Voice of My Vocation.” It can be sung to the melody of “Seven Spanish Angels,” which was a classic sung by Ray Charles and Willie Nelson.

Here is a link to a YouTube video of Amy singing “The Voice of My Vocation.” The words have inspired some of my former students to find a career and purpose for using their natural gifts.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tkqqEJ7KgcE>

The Work You Were Designed To Do

“**E**veryone has been made for some particular work, and the desire for that work has been put in every heart.” This quote by Rumi conveys the idea that each of us was designed for certain types of work and the answer to what that work is can be found within us. Finding out which types of work are best for you can be realized through a process of self-discovery.

The right work for you will be something you love and do well. It will feel natural for you. It will align with who you are and your true nature. This is why two of the most important questions to ask yourself and answer are “Who am I?” and “What work am I designed to do?”

Each of us were born with aptitudes and natural gifts. Johnson O’Connor Research Foundation has been doing aptitude testing for over ninety years. They have identified at least nineteen inborn aptitudes. Most people are strong in a few of these nineteen aptitudes and weak in some other aptitudes that call upon opposite strengths.

Johnson O’Connor Research Foundation can test

people beginning in their early teens. There have been people who have returned to be retested a few times in their lifetime. However, their strong aptitudes remained strong and their weak aptitudes were still weak in spite of their education, training, skills and life experience. This is not to say that there is not value from increasing one's intelligence, skills and education, but the test results support the theory that we are born with innate abilities and the potential to do certain things well.

Johnson O'Connor has also found that people who do not find careers that utilize their strongest aptitudes often become frustrated and unhappy with their jobs. Conversely, the most fulfilled people are usually those who found ways to use their natural and best aptitudes.

Finding the right type of work does not mean there is only one career for you. There may be several careers which match work that is natural for you to do. For example, lets say you are designed to teach. You do not necessarily have to be a classroom teacher or professor. You might become a coach, trainer, motivational speaker or someone who teaches through your writings, videos or song writing. If you are designed to help others heal from illness and injuries you could explore careers such as nurse, doctor, physical therapist, athletic trainer, laboratory scientist, engineer or inventor of products that promote wellness.

The purpose of this article is to get you thinking about the type of work you were designed to do. Perhaps you

realize that you are doing that work now in your current career which is fortunate. It is possible that you may know what work is right for you and you are preparing to gain the qualifications so you can do that type of work. Or you might be seeking to discover the type of work you were meant to do.

So first seek and discover the work you were designed to do and then find a matching career. You will not be fulfilled doing work that is not aligned with who you are and your innate gifts, aptitudes and proclivities. Abraham Maslow expressed it well. "A musician must make music, an artist must paint, a poet must write, if he is to be ultimately at peace with himself."

Your Special Gift

Have you discovered and identified the unique and special gift that you bring to others?

In the book, *True Purpose: 12 Strategies for Discovering the Difference You are Meant to Make* by Tim Kelley, the author discusses the idea that everyone brings a special gift or “blessing” which benefits others. He believes this is something we have been doing automatically since childhood and because it is so natural we often are not aware of it. This “blessing” is one aspect that Kelley believes can help people to discover their true purpose or what I refer to as our “calling.”

For example, one person’s blessing might be to help others to laugh more. For another it might be that people get along and communicate better when they are with this person.

In thinking about the special gift I bring to others, (obviously we have many gifts, but perhaps one is primary) I reflected on my life. I asked myself what is it that I cannot help doing that is natural and which I have been doing since my childhood? I realized the answer is that I see the positive qualities in others and then help them to become aware of these unique strengths. With my students I also help them

to see how to use and apply their strengths for school, career and life success.

So you might think about what is your special primary gift or blessing that you bring to others. What is the value of knowing this? Well, when you become aware of your unique gift you can use it consciously and more often. It can serve you well in your career, relationships and life.

There are major problems in the world today and many people feel stressed about this and about their own personal problems. If we can rekindle the spark inside of others it will be a blessing for them and for ourselves. After all, most of us know what it is like when someone shares their special gift with us and rekindles our flame. I share with you the words of Albert Schweitzer who talked about this idea. He said, "At times our own light goes out and is rekindled by a spark from another person. Each of us has cause to thank with deep gratitude those who lighted the flame within us."

You can identify your special gift and use it to benefit others. You might find that using your gift with conscious intention brings more joy into your life and to the people whose lives you touch.

Reference:

1. Kelley, Tim. *True Purpose: 12 Strategies for Discovering the Difference You are Meant to Make*. Transcendent Solutions Press. 2009.

Ten Steps for Early Career Success

You will soon graduate and begin your professional career. Naturally, you want to experience career success and fulfillment. What follows are ten steps which will help you get your career off to a great start. These strategies and principles will also help you to be successful throughout your career and to make a significant contribution.

1. Know your talents and skills.

You will be most effective in a career which uses your best and most enjoyable abilities. How can you discover your talents and skills? Look for them in your favorite achievements, no matter how small the accomplishments.

You can also find clues to your talents by analyzing things you love to do, love to learn, and even love to talk about. Consider favorite aspects of past jobs, internships, and volunteer work. If you enjoyed an aspect of a job, it is likely that you were using your favorite talents and skills.

Look at activities you love so much that time quickly slips away. Some of your talents were probably involved in

those activities. Is there anything you've done in school, leisure, or work that seemed almost effortless? You will probably discover that some of your best talents played a part in those activities.

Your talents, combined with a genuine regard for yourself and others, is a potentially powerful resource for making a great contribution.

2. Seek a job you feel passionate about.

How can you make a great contribution if you feel lukewarm or indifferent about your job or work purpose? It would be very difficult if not impossible to do so.

Where can you discover your passion? Ask yourself the following questions: What problems do you see in the world that you want to solve, resolve, or positively impact? What societal needs do you want to fill? What dreams or hopes of others would you like to make come true?

Choose a mission or work purpose that moves you. When you use your best talents for a purpose that fulfills you, how can you fail? You will be able to make a significant and positive difference.

3. Determine the types of jobs and companies that address the problems and needs you've identified.

Use public, school, and career libraries (Online or in-person) to research and identify employers and opportunities.

Conduct informational interviews with people—including hiring managers—in fields of work that interest you. Join professional associations that allow you to meet and network with people in your career field. Contact employers for their brochures and company information.

4. Find a mentor who will provide guidance and motivation. Seek mentors in your field of work and outside of your profession. Yes, you can have several different mentors. Choose mentors who are inspiring examples of the kind of person you aspire to be. Simply ask them to be your mentors. Most will flattered and eager to help you.

Where to find mentors? Look at your place of business, professional associations, church, and among family and friends. Ask others for recommendations. Napoleon Hill, author of *Think and Grow Rich*, spoke of the advantages of forming a “mastermind alliance.” This is a group of people with varied skills who can help you achieve your goals. You can form a brain trust of people who support you and your dreams.

5. Study, read, and learn everything you can about your job and career field.

Take advantage of company training programs and local continuing education classes. If you read one book a week in your field of work, that will be over fifty books in a year. This

will set you apart from your competition and you will be on your way to becoming an expert in your field. You can also listen to books on tape when you're too busy to read.

6. Commit yourself to doing a great job.

Be willing to go the extra mile. Work hard and show your employer that you are dedicated to your job. Be a dependable employee who can be counted on.

Become known as a person of high character and integrity. A good reputation takes time to build, but can be destroyed overnight. Establish an excellent reputation both as person and professional. It will follow you wherever you go and will bring much success and happiness.

7. Take excellent care of your physical and mental health.

Maintain your vitality by eating healthy foods, exercising, and getting proper rest. Balance your life with healthy and enjoyable recreational activities, time with family and friends, and a spiritual life that provides inner strength.

8. Avoid drugs and go easy on alcohol.

You need a clear mind with an ability to focus your attention on the task at hand, to be successful. No one can achieve greatness in sports, business, or any endeavor without the ability to concentrate. Drugs and alcohol scatter and weaken the mind. A clear mind produces clarity of thought which results in positive actions. Positive actions will bring you success.

There are many visualization, meditation, and bio-feedback techniques that can increase your power of concentration.

9. Stay positive, motivated, and inspired.

You may encounter prejudice from certain people and many other obstacles in the workplace. Avoid negative people and events which drag you down, as much as you can. It is important to learn to get along with others who have different values and who see life differently than you do. There is great diversity in today's workplace which demands adaptability and the ability to work as a team member.

Read inspiring biographies of others who overcame obstacles to success. Listen to audios and watch video that motivate and uplift you.

10. Build a portfolio of your accomplishments.

Before leaving any job or position, request a letter of recommendation from your supervisors. Keep all of your letters and performance evaluations. These letters and evaluations should become part of a portfolio that you are building. Include articles by and about you and any example of performance excellence. Take your portfolio to job interviews and present it when you are being considered for promotions.

You are moving closer to your graduation date. You and your family made sacrifices and worked hard to get you to

this level of achievement. You will soon start your professional career. A new beginning awaits you. If you apply the ten steps in this article, you will increase the odds of having a fulfilling career and life.

Discover Your True Vocation and Calling

“**W**here your talents and the needs of the world cross, there lies your vocation.” These were the words of Aristotle and let’s look at what he is saying.

First, consider what is meant by the word “vocation.” It comes from the Latin word for “voice”. It refers to a calling that you hear or a pull from within that you feel. A calling comes from within you and inspires you to move in a certain career direction.

Your true calling is the work you feel called to do. This is the work you were born to do and will find most fulfilling. According to Aristotle, when you discover and use your best and favorite talents to fulfill a need which you are passionate about, you have found your true work. This will be a vocation that resonates with who you are and aligns with your ability to make an excellent contribution to others.

Let’s look at an example of someone who used a favorite talent to serve a need or to solve a problem that others were experiencing. The other night my wife and I watched a PBS special about the life and career of Joan Baez. She was

known as the “Queen of folk music” in the 1960s and beyond. When Joan Baez was a young girl she discovered a love and talent for singing and playing the guitar.

Eventually she became a well known folk singer. Even though she was using her enormous talent, she still felt that something was missing. Eventually she became a force in the peace and civil rights movements. She began using her music to protest injustice, persecution and discrimination, and the Viet Nam war.

When Joan Baez started using her talent to serve a need in the world (which she was deeply passionate about) she became fulfilled. Her talents were channeled into a higher calling or purpose. You can also find your true vocation when your special abilities and a need in the world of great interest to you come together.

Make a list of your special knowledge’s (subjects you know a lot about) and of your favorite and best skills and talents. Also make a list of needs or problems in the world that interest you. How well does your knowledge, skills and talents match up with these needs? Choose the need that calls out to you most strongly and brainstorm ways that you could fulfill this need by using your greatest ability. It is also possible that you may need more education and training to acquire the knowledge and skills to positively impact the problem in the world that you have chosen. Do what you need to do to discover and work at the vocation that is right for you. Do this and you will not only find personal fulfillment, but you will make a positive difference in the world.

The Right Career

If you can answer “yes” to the following questions you have discovered the right career for yourself:

1. **Does this vocation support, express and fulfill my mission?** Your mission is the number one positive difference in the world that you want to make. It is the mark or footprint you want to leave behind and the main work you came in this world to do. Other jobs that you had along the way will often serve as steppingstones and preparation for your true vocation.
2. **Does it allow me to use my best talents and favorite skills?** Your talents are natural abilities which either come easily to you or you can develop them much easier than trying to acquire talents you don't have.
3. **Does this work energize and inspire me?** This career will make you feel alive and time will seem to fly when you are doing it?
4. **Does it benefit me and others?** Both are necessary or you will lose interest after a while.

5. **Do I feel passionate about doing this work?** Your heart will be in it and the work will be exciting. You will feel that this work really matters.
6. **Do I delight in doing this work? Do I love and do it well?** The right livelihood will bring you much joy and you will do it well. There will be times when you feel as if the creativity and work are effortlessly flowing through you. It will be expressed from deep within and from the core of who you are.

If you answered “yes” to these questions you have found your true vocation. At least you know what it is even if you are still in pursuit of actually doing this work. If you have not discovered the work that is right for you, then keep searching. The answers are within you. Rumi, the mystic poet put it this way, “Everyone is born for some particular work and the desire for this work is in every heart.”

Self-knowledge will lead you to your right work. Self-reflect by examining your life experiences to see the clues. What are the lessons from your life? What do your life experiences reveal to you about what you love and do best?

Your true work and mission will bring out the best of your potential, your fears and obstacles will be overcome or will melt away and it will fulfill you. When you discover a purpose and mission larger than yourself it will change your life. Look at the example of Mahatma Gandhi who transformed his life and the lives of many others after discovering and pursuing his mission.

From childhood to early adulthood Gandhi felt painfully shy, awkward, lacked self-confidence and was full of many fears. Later in his life he was courageous, confident and was able to unite the Indian people to free India from British rule. Gandhi's compassion for the Indian people and his opposition to injustice created a burning desire in him to free India and this mission transformed him into someone who was considered by others to be a "Mahatma" or great soul.

This is the power that a great mission can have on you and others. When you discover a career that can help you to fulfill your mission you will have also found your true calling and right work.

SECTION TWO

Building Expertise and Making Your Dream Career Happen

“Face challenges, fear and frustration
by seeking out knowledge and
opportunities for growth.”

Fanny Mairena

Apprenticeships, Mentorship and Internships

During your formal education and in the early years of your career it is very helpful to be an apprentice to a great mentor. This does not necessarily mean a formal apprenticeship as in the trades, but an opportunity to get hands-on experience from an expert in your chosen career field.

While in school take advantage of internship opportunities and once you have started your career seek out a mentor or even more than one mentor. It should be a mentor who you aspire to be like, that is you want to learn the best of what this expert knows and can do.

Many people are willing to serve as a mentor if you are sincere, passionate about your career and willing to take advice. Choose a mentor who is willing to give you constructive criticism and will show you how to improve. You want tough love, that is someone who can be tough when needed, but who really cares about you and your progress.

According to Robert Greene, author of the book *Mastery*, most masters or experts passed through an apprenticeship

period of 5-10 years while they were developing their skills. It usually takes that long to accumulate 10,000 plus hours of practice. These early years in your career are critical because they can lay the foundation for a lifetime of success or failure. The wrong mentor can do harm and the right mentor can do a lot of good for you.

Look for a career opportunity that will offer you the greatest possibility for learning and practical knowledge which you can apply. According to Greene, the goal of an apprenticeship isn't money, job title or status. You want to challenge yourself and not choose the easier or more prestigious path. Greene believes, and I agree, that between two career choices you are wiser to choose less money at first if it will result in the best learning experience. If you learn a lot and become an expert in your field, then there will be many years in which you are likely to do very well financially. During this intense learning period or apprenticeship you will be observing your mentor, modeling their skills and then practicing these skills over and over again. This will lead you to mastery and expertise. One day you will probably be better than your mentor and will use and continue to build your skills in your own unique way.

Reference:

1. Greene, Robert. *Mastery*. Penquin Group. November 13, 2012.

Plant Seeds and Be Patient for Results

When I was young I would frequently say to my father, “I want to hurry up and get through with school” or “I want this or that to happen faster.” His reply was “Don’t wish your life away.” In other words, enjoy the journey and your life right now, instead of feeling frustrated because you have not yet arrived at your destination.

Life consists of both journeys and destinations. Journeys lead us to our destinations. For example, if you are a college freshman pursuing a college degree this is part of your journey. It may be a journey that takes you four or more years to complete. Your college degree or goal is your destination (which will probably begin a new journey). It is not that the journey is bad and the destination is good. Both can be perceived as good, especially if you enjoy them. They are both helping you to fulfill your desires and goals.

You are only guaranteed the present moment in which you are now living. The past is a memory and the future is uncertain and has not yet arrived. Now, in the present moment of your life, is the time that you can live, act and enjoy. Both

your journey and your destination can only be experienced in the present and both of them can be enjoyed.

The problem is that many of us become impatient with the journey to our goals. Then frustration and discouragement replaces feelings of success, optimism and enjoyment. During the journey it is as if you are planting seeds and nurturing the soil before your effort bears fruit. There is a story about this that I tell my students which helps them to see the journey in a different light and to become more patient for results from their efforts.

The Story of the Chinese Bamboo Tree

This is a true story about the Chinese bamboo tree which may contain lessons and truths that can be applied to your life. You start by planting a seed in the ground and then you must water and fertilize it frequently. After one year there are no visible signs above ground that the seed has sprouted and that growth is occurring. You continue to water and fertilize the seed for another year, and still, there are no apparent results from your efforts. So you continue to water and fertilize the ground where you planted the seed for a third year, but you still see nothing happening. You continue for a fourth year and still there is no apparent growth.

During the fifth year you can begin to see a shoot above ground and signs that growth is occurring. And then something remarkable happens! The tree grows over 90 feet in six

weeks. Eventually the seed you planted is capable of becoming a tree that grows over 200 feet tall.

Once the bamboo tree becomes visible (even as a shoot) it grows rapidly. What was happening during all of those years that you were watering and fertilizing the seed? It was developing strong and wide root structures to support the tree and its rapid growth above ground. In other words, the foundation upon which it would grow and stand was being developed during the first four years.

Lessons from the story:

- Your life dreams are like seeds
- Plant, water and nurture your dream seeds
- Keep working and be patient
- Results may remain invisible for some time
- Just as a tall tree can arise from a tiny seed, so can your dream seeds manifest into something great
- Take care of the seeds and reap the harvest

Please answer and think about the following questions:

1. What is one experience from your life that is similar to a lesson in the story of the Chinese bamboo tree?
2. How can you apply an important lesson in the story to your life? What is that lesson and the action you will take?

Right Type of Practice to Maximize Learning and Expertise

All types of practice are not equal for producing the best results. Just practicing by doing something a lot will not by itself lead to becoming an expert or high performer. For example, many people having been driving a car for years and yet they do not keep improving. In the beginning we do improve our driving skills, but after awhile our driving relies on automatic skills. Without consciously practicing to improve our driving skills our progress plateaus and stalls. This is not only true with driving, but in other areas as well.

It is true that becoming an expert at any worthwhile endeavor will most likely take many hours of practice, but a lot of time spent without the right type of practice is not enough.

Anders Ericsson is an expert on how to develop expertise. He is a cognitive psychologist who has devoted over thirty years to studying elite performers – the best in their fields – in many different disciplines. For example, Ericsson has studied musicians, memory experts, great athletes,

mathematicians, scientists, chess players, ballerinas and more. In the book, *Peak: Secrets from the New Science of Expertise* by Anders Ericsson and Robert Pool, the authors share results from many of Ericsson's research studies.

Dr. Ericsson discovered that all of the elite performers in different fields who he studied and anyone who wants to significantly improve at anything – follow a similar set of principles in their practice or training sessions. He describes what he calls, “Purposeful Practice” and “Deliberate Practice.” Both are the same except that deliberate practice requires a mentor or coach and a subject which has a well established criteria for success in that field or discipline. In other words, it is known exactly what an elite performer must be able to do in that discipline and what it will take to try and get there. Purposeful practice can bring about significant improvement and expertise, but deliberate practice is needed to become among the best in the world at what you do.

Purposeful Practice

According to Ericsson purposeful practice consists of the following four principles of practice:

1. **A well-defined goal.** You must have a specific and measurable goal. This requires a plan of action and breaking your goal into a series of small steps. Both the goal and steps should be measurable so that you can tell when you are making progress.

2. **Focused attention.** You must focus on your goal and not split and divide your attention. You need to focus on the task before you and be fully present in the moment.
3. **Feedback is needed.** It is ideal if you have a coach or mentor, but if not, you can use your own observation and take notes to measure your progress and results.
4. **Stretch your comfort zone.** Push yourself some, but not too much beyond your comfort level. You are trying to keep doing a little more than you have done before.

Lets look at an example of how these principles might be applied. Lets say you want to improve your basketball skills. There are many skills that you could work on such as rebounding, dribbling, passing, three point shooting, layups, etc. Lets say you are a 50% free throw shooter. You average sinking five free throws out of every ten shots and you want to improve to become an 80% free throw shooter.

Goal. You can start with a step to improve to a 60% free throw shooter even though your long-term and ultimate goal is to average 80%. You schedule practice sessions and begin working to improve your free throw shooting. This is an example of a well-defined goal which you have broken into small steps. After you are consistently shooting 60% you can go for 70% and continue until you achieve your goal of 80%.

Focus: You eliminate distractions such as your cell phone during practice sessions. You concentrate on basketball and try to forget everything else at that time.

Feedback. You use your observation skills and later take notes about how you are doing. Take note of how many shots out of every ten go in. Also notice what in your practice sessions is helping you the most. For example, you might find shooting in front of the free throw line and then gradually moving back to it improves your shooting. Do more of what works and less of what is less effective.

Stretch your comfort zone. Try to do a little more than you could do previously. Remember, “no pain, no gain.” Keep raising the bar in small increments. Use the principle of Kaizen. This is a Japanese word which means small incremental steps to continuous improvement.

Applications of Purposeful Practice and 10,000 Hour Rule

These purposeful practice principles can be applied to any goal and this can move you toward becoming an expert in your chosen career field.

You may have heard the term, “ten thousand hour rule.” The idea is that it can take about 10,000 hours to master what you do. Dr. Ericsson says this is a misinterpretation of his research results and that it is not a rule. He says it varies

how much time is needed from one domain to another. For example, it may take a little less than 10,000 hours in one field and a lot more in another. He found that to become an elite violinist who plays solos in a professional orchestra takes an average of twenty years. This takes much more than 10,000 hours of practice. Typically 10,000 hours will take about ten years unless one has many hours a day to devote to the practice sessions.

What is true is that it will take many hours of practice to become an expert and this must be the right type of practice (as we have discussed) for best results. In his thirty years of studying elite performers Ericsson did not find anyone who used only “natural talent” and needed little practice. Those who demonstrated superior talent at an early age only became top performers if they also practiced purposefully and deliberately for thousands of hours. Talent alone did not get them there.

If you are an educator think of creating more learning objectives which help students to do (acquire skills), not just to know (acquire knowledge). The ability to apply knowledge is essential for success in excellent 21st century jobs and careers. Many hours of the right type of practice will maximize learning and lead to mastery and expertise.

Reference:

1. Ericsson, Anders and Robert Pool. *Peak: Secrets from the New Science of Expertise*. Eamon Dolan/Houghton Mifflin Harcourt. April 5, 2016.

Becoming An Expert In Your Field

Some people become jacks of many trades and masters of none. Others go deep into a particular career field and become masters of one. Is it better to become an expert in a particular career or to know a little about many different careers? Both approaches have advantages and disadvantages, but in today's job market most of the better jobs need people who are capable of becoming experts in their field.

Going deep into a particular career that suits you is likely to bring you both intrinsic and extrinsic rewards. By becoming an expert or master in your field you will increase the possibility of making a positive and powerful difference for others. Employers are not looking for employees with shallow knowledge and average skills. Customers are not interested in purchasing products or services from entrepreneurs who lack expertise in their field. This is why going deep into a specific and well-suited career will offer you many advantages.

Earl Nightingale, known as "The Dean of Personal Development," used to encourage people to devote one extra hour a day studying about their field. He said if you do this

you will become an expert in your field in five years. That one hour per day will add up to 1,825 hours in a five year period. This amount of study can make a major difference in your level of knowledge and expertise.

Recently I witnessed a good example of someone who went deep into one line of work, and although still very young, he was on his way to becoming a master of his trade and craft. My wife and I needed a plumber to come to our house to fix a leak.

Two men arrived to fix the plumbing problem. One was a young man who looked like a teenager, but he was 26 years old. The other man appeared to be in his late 30s or early 40s. I assumed that the younger man was there to learn about plumbing from the older one, but I was mistaken. The younger man owned the plumbing business and he was teaching the older man how to become a plumber.

The young man began working in the plumbing business as an apprentice at the age of 18. Now at only 26 he was about to get his Master's Plumber License. He had decided to go in depth in the field of plumbing and was fast becoming an expert already. He told me that his friends had been jumping from one career to another every couple of years. They were not doing well financially and felt unsuccessful at any work they had tried. The young man said that going deep into one field had paid off for him.

I wondered if the young plumber was really making that good of a living. And then he handed me the bill. "Hello!"

and “whoa!” were the first words that quickly came into my mind. Seeing the bill made me realize that he was making a good living indeed. This story is just one example of the value of going for depth of knowledge and skill in a particular field of work instead of going shallow in many different areas.

You can probably think of examples of people you know or know of who have become experts because they focused their attention on attaining deep knowledge and skills in their career field. This is not to say that one cannot become an expert in more than one career, but it is unlikely to happen in a large number of dissimilar careers. It is easier to gain expertise in other careers that are similar enough for you to use some of your transferrable skills.

Once you have realized the type of work you were designed for and you have chosen a suitable career then you can prepare yourself for it. Preparation might include getting the necessary education and credentials, training and skills, extra studying on your own, mentoring or coaching if needed and more practice and experience once you are working in your career. You might find hidden treasures and rewards by going deep.

In the book, *Think and Grow Rich* by Napoleon Hill, he tells the true story of a man who owned a gold mine. After a few years of digging and not finding any gold the man gave up and sold the mine. The new owner dug three feet deeper and struck gold and became wealthy. Like digging for gold in a mine you can go deep into your career field, achieve expertise and reap the rewards that await you.

How to Find a Job in an Economic Crisis (Or anytime)

There is a hidden job market that most job seekers do not know about. The visible job market is only the tip of the iceberg because many of the best jobs are not advertised. When I worked as a self-employed recruiter most of my job search assignments were known only to the employer, a few people in the company and me.

The good news for college graduates is that unemployment is much less for them than for those with only a high school diploma. The bad news is that many college graduates are unemployed or under employed and competing with many others for the better jobs.

The mistake that most job seekers make is to follow the crowd and to do what everybody else is doing. This puts you in competition with too many people, especially during an economic downturn. Let's take a look at the job seeking methods most people use and that are less likely to produce good results. Most job seekers do the following:

- Send out lots of resumes

- Post resumes online
- Answer want ads
- Go to employment agencies
- Go to job fairs

It is okay to spend a small amount of your time using the methods listed above, but not much, because these are the least effective job search strategies. They are less likely to get you a good job when compared to the two job search strategies that I am going to present to you.

So what are the best and most effective job search methods? If you can find the unadvertised jobs you will have little or no competition. Many employers who have job openings do not advertise them or list them with employment agencies, but prefer to ask their employees and other people they know to recommend someone.

There are two types of unadvertised or hidden jobs:

- 1. Job openings that the employer knows about.**
- 2. Jobs that could be created for the right person, but no job opening currently exists.**

Let's look at the first one. How can you find these unadvertised job openings? Here are a few ways:

- First you must know the type of work that you want to do, are suited for and feel passionate about.

- **Research.** Go to the library (or to online directories) and identify at least 25 companies of interest from directories of major employers. Examples would be Dun and Bradstreet's Million Dollar Directory and Standard and Poor's Register of Corporations. The librarian can help you to find other directories and resources for your research. Select several companies of interest.
- **Use the Dictionary of Occupational Titles (DOT) and Occupational Outlook Handbook (OOH)** online to identify jobs you want and the skills and experience required to perform them. The OOH will also give you an idea of salary ranges for different jobs.
- **Conduct informational interviews** with people in your fields of interest to further your research.
- **Contact people you know** (and who they know) to see if they can refer you to anyone who works for your companies of interest.
- **Call hiring authorities directly** and tell them what you would like to do. Let them know how you could contribute to and benefit their company. If they do not have job openings in your field of interest then ask for the names of two other hiring authorities in their field of work.
- **Join professional associations** in your field of interest or go as a guest. You will meet people who work in this field and many hiring managers.

The second approach to uncovering the hidden job market is to create a job where no opening exists. You will have no competition and can negotiate your income. Develop a written or verbal proposal for the companies that interest you. The research and informational interviews you've conducted should enable you to determine which companies have a need for an employee with your skills and interests. Your proposal should state what the proposed job is and how you can contribute to the company by solving their problems. If your proposal demonstrates that you can contribute much more than you will cost the company, it is likely that they will be interested in you.

I have personally used this approach to create a job that did not exist and have taught others how to do it. This method works best with smaller companies, but it has been used successfully with large companies. For example, an acquaintance of mine created a job for himself as a high school teacher. Public schools are usually considered to be bureaucracies, but he was able to use a proposal to create a job teaching several courses of interest that could be incorporated in already approved and existing courses.

Keep in mind that even during the Great Depression seventy five percent of the people were employed. Even in difficult times there are jobs if you can fulfill a need.

So be proactive and go directly after the jobs and companies that interest you. Find the hidden jobs that already

exist or create a new one. The reward for successfully using these proactive strategies can be the blessing of discovering and obtaining a fulfilling career-one that makes use of your enjoyable and best talents.

SECTION THREE

Finding Your Work Purpose and Mission

“Follow your bliss.”

Joseph Campbell

How to Awaken the Greatness Within You

The power to make a positive difference comes primarily from within. It has more to do with who we are than what we say. This is why Mahatma Gandhi said, “My life is my teaching” and “Be the change you want to see in the world”. Our example speaks louder than words, but our words are also a reflection of who we are as a person.

Gandhi is a great example of someone who transformed himself and the lives of many others when he shifted from self-consciousness to other-consciousness. From childhood to early adulthood, Gandhi felt awkward and self-conscious. He was shy and had many fears. Only when he became captivated by a passionate mission- a sense of purpose larger than himself- was he able to transcend his fears.

Gandhi’s compassion for the Indian people and his desire to free India from British rule became a burning desire that transformed Gandhi into a man of great courage, love, and inner strength. His life’s purpose took him beyond his petty self-concerns and self-imposed limitations. He became a great leader who inspired a nation to fulfill his mission.

Success and happiness that eludes us when we seek them directly will frequently come when our focus is on contributing to others. We need to get out of our own way and allow the power within to be expressed.

How to Find a Great Purpose

Many of us want to make a positive contribution. We want to know that our having lived on this earth made a positive difference in the lives of others. Your positive actions can inspire others to glimpse their own potential and to become what they are capable of becoming. This brings joy, meaning, and fulfillment to your life.

You may be wondering, “Okay, fine, but how am I supposed to find a great purpose that transcends my fears and self-concerns?” First, take a look at the multitude of problems and needs in the world. Which ones do you feel passionate about? Are there problems in the world that make you angry or sad? What inspires you to act? What impact do you want to have on the world? How could you use your talents to contribute to humanity? Answering questions like these can help you to discover how you want to be of service.

Your Enormous Potential

Many Psychologists have said that most people use only a small percentage of their brain power and creativity. Enormous resources are within each of us, but they often remain dormant until we find a purpose that transcends our

self. We move then from self-centeredness to focusing on our unique way of helping others.

Like Gandhi, we can also rise above our weaknesses and liberate our dormant potential when we decide how we want to be of service. This is the secret for awakening the greatness within you.

Follow Your Bliss and Mission

“Follow your bliss” was Mythology Professor Joseph Campbell’s reply when his students asked him, “What should I do with my life? What should be my vocation?” In other words, his message was to follow your heart and do work what brings you the greatest joy.

Your mission is a calling or higher purpose that you feel inspired to fulfill. A mission is any worthwhile purpose for which you feel a deep sense of commitment and connection. It will usually involve a cause you feel deeply about and use talents that bring you joy.

Bill Moyers recently interviewed Dr. Jane Goodall, the scientist who became well known for her work in Africa with gorillas and chimpanzees. She discovered her mission at a young age and had the courage to follow her bliss.

Fascinated by reading books about Tarzan, Jane Goodall at age eleven began to develop a longing to go to Africa to live among and study animals in the wild. Eventually, under the influence of famed anthropologist Dr. Louis Leakey, she became a scientist who spent years observing gorillas and chimps in their natural habitat.

Whereas her earlier mission had taken the form of studying animals in the wild many hours a day for years, it took on a different form over the past twenty years. As many animal species started becoming extinct or greatly reduced due to climate change and because of unnecessary killings and other factors, she began to travel extensively to teach others how to protect the environment and animal species. She travels over 300 hundred days a year to spread her message, especially to young people and students who often receive her as if she were a rock star. Many in her audience become actively involved in protecting animal species and the environment because of Jane Goodall's passion and example.

The great love and compassion for animals that Dr. Goodall has was evident from her childhood. She has always been on a mission to help them, but her role as a scientist and observer diminished and her role as a teacher increased because she felt the need and inner calling to do so. Examples like hers can inspire us to discover our own mission, follow our bliss and live our dream.

For more information about Dr. Goodall and her work you can go to <http://www.janegoodall.org>.

The Power of Purpose for Student Success

Most educators have probably asked the question, “What can I do to help more students to generate the motivation to succeed in school?” It has been my experience that many of my most motivated and best students are those who have a strong career purpose which provides relevance to their education.

A compelling purpose or sense of mission, even prior to determining a specific career, usually generates the intrinsic motivation to pursue that sense of calling. For example, “I want to be involved in healing and rehabilitation of the sick and injured” or “I want to bring more beauty to the world by using my artistic talents.” Missions such as these are compelling and can motivate students to explore a variety of careers that might be a good fit for their overall work purpose and talents.

So one way to help more students to develop the motivation to succeed in school is to help them to discover a purpose. A strong purpose marshals talents, brings out potential and drives goals. It answers the questions, “Why am I

in school?” and “Why should I work hard at my studies and learn as much as possible?”

William Damon, a psychologist and research scholar at Stanford University conducted a four-year study with 12-22 year olds to assess their sense of purpose (Damon 2008). Only one out of five had a clear sense of what they wanted to do with their lives. Many felt lost, lacked motivation and had little self-confidence. Those who had a strong sense of purpose had aspirations that were stimulated by two realizations:

1. There is something in the world that needs to be sustained or improved.
2. I can contribute something to this effort.

In other words, they discovered a need that they felt passionate about filling or a problem they were motivated to try and solve or positively impact. Secondly, they believed that they could use their abilities to make a positive contribution to this problem. This is what Aristotle meant when he said, “Where your talents and the needs of the world cross, there lies your vocation.”

As educators we can encourage students who have not found a purpose to take a career course if available. A good career exploration course can provide students with exposure to and awareness of a variety of societal needs and different careers that might address those needs or problems. Students also need to hear different speakers in-person and online

talking about their careers and purpose. Teachers can also share with students why they chose education as a career and talk about their purpose. Students can do job shadowing, internships, informational interviews, volunteer work, and try different part-time jobs to find out what fascinates them and what they dislike.

Self-reflection activities that give students time to think can be used to increase their self-knowledge. This needs to be followed by exposure to a variety of needs or problems and related careers plus more self-reflection based on their experiences. This will increase their chances of discovering a purpose and career they feel matters. Then these students are likely to have the intrinsic motivation to study, learn and succeed in school.

Reference:

1. Damon, William. (2008). *The Path to Purpose: How Young people Find Their Calling in Life*. Free Press.

On Being a Source of Light for Others

One of the greatest joys in life comes from helping others. The feeling that comes from making a positive difference is hard to beat. It gives a sense of meaning, purpose and fulfillment to our lives.

For those of us who work in the fields of teaching, counseling and other helping professions sometimes we see the difference we are making and often we do not know. Most of the people who we helped go on their own way and we lose contact with them. Most of them do not let us know if we made a positive impact on their lives unless we happen to run into them.

Almost twenty years ago while working as a vocational rehabilitation counselor I had an eighteen year old girl on my caseload. She was troubled, rebellious, estranged from her parents, on her own and having a hard time. I was able to help her find a job and to pay for her to go to college. She earned a Bachelors Degree in Psychology and then I lost track of her.

Recently I ran into her in a grocery store and we recognized each other. Now she is in her late 30s, has a Masters

Degree in Social Work (MSW) and has a career as a social worker. She enjoys helping others and said she is happy with her life. She thanked me for the helping hand and wanted me to know that she is paying it forward by helping others, including troubled teens like she was at one time.

It was a wonderful feeling to see that she was happy and doing well. My role was small and she was the one who made it happen, but it felt good to know that I was able to lend a helping hand at a critical time in her life. We often do not know the full effect of the work that we do.

Sometimes sharing the right idea with someone at the right time can be life-changing for them. It is often the little things that we do — a smile, listening, sharing an idea or some other act of kindness that makes the big difference for others.

We can be a source of light for others, just as others have been for us. Albert Schweitzer expressed this idea beautifully when he said, “At times our own light goes out and is rekindled by a spark from another person. Each of us has cause to think with deep gratitude of those who have lighted the flame within us.”

Living Your Own Life

Are you living the life you want to live or the one someone else wants for you?

Recently I watched a movie called, “The Three Idiots” which was made in India. The movie combines humor and sadness with a strong message for “Living your own life.” A recurring message was to follow your passion and to fulfill your calling or true vocation.

In India and many other countries a lot of students feel pressured by their parents, teachers, peers and society to go into specific vocations such as engineering, mathematics, science and medicine. If these students do not measure up they feel like failures and suicide rates are high as a result. Many of these students go against their talents and natural inclinations by choosing college majors and careers that are not suitable for them.

A message in the movie was that true success and happiness remain elusive when you place all of your emphasis on earning top grades and big bucks. The message was that when students place emphasis on learning, following their passion, and using their innate gifts, success will naturally follow. The hero in the movie believed that “Success will chase

you” when you love what you do and enjoy the present moments of your life.

Rumi, the mystic poet said, “Everyone was born for some particular work and the desire for that work was placed in every heart.” Finding the type of work that is meant for you is a process of self-discovery.

A good education should include helping students to discover their natural talents, strengths, inclinations and careers they were born to do. As educators we can serve as catalysts to bring about this awakening in our students. If we do this, many more students will be motivated to learn, will succeed in school and will make a positive contribution to society.

SECTION FOUR

Making a Positive Difference

“All labor that uplifts humanity has
dignity and importance and should be
undertaken with pains-taking excellence.”

Martin Luther King

What Every Young Person Should Know

Your life will pass by quickly. Ask your self important questions such as:

1. What do I really want to do with my short and precious life?
2. Are my actions taking me there?
3. If not, what actions do I need to take to get on track?

Ask yourself how you can use your best and favorite talents to make a positive difference for others while working in a career that you feel matters. Then educate yourself and improve your intelligence, skills and perception so that you are qualified to work in your field of interest.

Work on your own self-improvement, not only to become an expert in your field, but also to become a wonderful human being. You can develop your character and make a positive difference in this world.

The power to make an excellent contribution will come from within you. As you improve yourself so will your ability

to influence others. Your very example can help others because we radiate who we are.

The world is facing major problems and this creates opportunities and the need for solving them. Your generation are the future leaders and influencers and are needed to make this a better world, perhaps even to save it from destruction.

Hospice nurses who work with people who are dying tell us that most people do not regret what they have done as much as what they have not done. They do not so much regret their mistakes and failures when they tried their best. They regret not attempting to follow their heart and pursuing their dreams.

Do not become one of these people who is full of regret at the end. Pursue your dreams now while you have the opportunity.

Never doubt that your life can make a difference. Margaret Mead put it this way, "Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world. Indeed, it is the only thing that ever has." You can choose to be one of these people.

Message To Young Future Leaders

Do you want to become a leader and person of positive influence? The world needs you and your leadership.

The world needs people who want to make a positive difference, to solve big problems and to contribute to making this a better world. You have the choice to do harm and bring more darkness into the world or to do good and add more light.

The world is facing many major challenges such as economic, environmental, health, educational, wars and other problems. Is there a problem that you would like to work on and try to solve? Is there a need you would like to fill? Problems often create needs which result in opportunities for finding solutions. This is how many new jobs are created.

You can choose a career field which allows you to use your talents to work on problems that matter to you. Discovering a strong work purpose or mission will give you the passion and motivation to make a contribution and to become a leader for others.

What are the characteristics of great leaders? Lets look

at Mahatma Gandhi who I believe was one of the greatest leaders in history. As you may know, Gandhi united a nation, freed India from British rule and achieved it through non-violence.

Here is a list of qualities that I believe made Gandhi an excellent leader:

- Ability to inspire. He inspired by his example and brought out the best in those who followed him.
- Integrity and Honesty. His thoughts, words and actions were aligned. He lived by principles which he did not compromise and was a person of truth. He had strong morals and ethics.
- Visionary. Gandhi envisioned a free India. It was his mission to make this vision a reality. He communicated his vision to others who also adopted his mission.
- Humility. Gandhi put others before himself. He was not filled with his own self-importance. He was both self-confident and humble. Gandhi was a servant leader who never asked anyone to do anything that he would not do himself.
- Courage. He had the courage to follow his convictions under difficult conditions and to risk his life to pursue his mission.
- Perseverance. He would not give up in the pursuit of

his vision and mission no matter how great the hardships and dangers.

- Self-Discipline. He could get the best out of himself and do whatever was necessary to get the job done.
- Focused attention. Gandhi lived in the present moment and was able to concentrate on any task before him.
- Love. He hated injustice, but not any person, including his enemies. He could connect with the inner core of a person and cared for others.
- Humor. Gandhi took his principles seriously, but could poke fun at himself. He was full of joy and could make others lighten up.
- Communication. Gandhi was able to communicate his thoughts and ideas well, both orally and in writing.
- Faith. Gandhi had faith in a higher power. He also had faith in himself and his followers. He was highly intuitive and followed his inner guidance.

Gandhi was not a born leader. He was very shy, insecure and awkward in his youth. He lost his self-consciousness when his focus shifted from self-concerns to helping others. His strong mission galvanized his inner resources and brought out the best qualities in him. You can also develop similar qualities in yourself if you aspire to become a great leader.

I leave you now with what John Quincy Adams had to say about leadership. “If your actions inspire others to dream more, learn more, do more and become more, you are a leader.”

Becoming A Force For Good

Imagine a fork in the road with different paths. The path to the left is destructive, disempowering and will make the world and our lives worse. The path to the right is constructive, empowering and will make the world and our lives better. There is also a path in the middle which leads to a dead end. The path in the middle is a path of inaction in which neither of the other two roads are chosen. Which road do you think most of humanity will choose? Which path is your choice?

The world is facing major problems such as the spread of terrorism, wars, weapons of mass destruction, dramatic climate changes, health, educational and economic challenges and diminishing humane values. Some of these problems have the potential to cause large scale destruction and harm. On the other hand there are breakthroughs in medicine, science, technology and other fields which have the potential to create a better world.

You can choose to be a force for good which will help counter destructive forces. You can have a positive effect on those who come within your circle of influence. If enough people choose to become forces for good and take

the constructive path then we can improve the world. If too many people take the destructive path we can do great harm to ourselves, to others and to the planet itself.

You can let your voice be heard. This does not necessarily mean through the spoken or written word. You can express your voice through your own unique talents. It can be expressed through art, music, science, business, entertainment or in any field of endeavor that appeals to you.

The first step is to discover your own voice and unique form of expression. Then passionately express yourself as a force for good, create your own masterpiece and bring your light and goodness into the world. It begins with our own self-improvement and knowing ourselves. As Mahatma Gandhi once expressed it, “Be the change you wish to see in the world.” It starts with each individual. This is how to improve the world. Be patient and think deeply before choosing the path you will follow.

Making the Most of Your Precious Life

“**W**hat is it you plan to do with your one wild and precious life?” The poet Mary Oliver asks us to reflect on this question in one of her poems just after reminding us that we all have to die and soon.

Time is passing quickly and your life is precious. This is why I encourage my students to follow the advice of Joseph Campbell who said, “Follow your bliss.” Why not pursue career and other goals which will bring you the greatest joy?

What are you passionate about? Who is the person you wish to become? What do you want to accomplish with your life? Before the end of your life what must you achieve to feel that yours was a life well lived?

After you have set clear goals you can ask yourself, “Do my actions support my values and goals?” In other words, is the way you are living your life taking you where you want to go? If not, you can change your habits and actions in order to achieve your dreams.

If you are a student who desires to be successful in school it is important to engage in honest self-examination and ask

yourself these kinds of questions. Let's say you became aware that you were spending 15 hours a week socializing with friends, another 15 hours a week playing video and computer games and two hours a week studying. Would your actions be supporting your goal of becoming a successful student? Obviously the answer is no, but the good news is you could change your habits and get back on track to the success you want.

Keeping your dreams and goals before your mind's eye is a great way to stay motivated. Then with hard work and determination you can achieve your dreams. The philosopher, Epictetus put it this way, "First say to yourself what you would be, and then do what you have to do." Clear and worthy goals that you feel passionate about, honest self-examination and determination to succeed are secrets to making the most of your precious life.

Giving Life Your Best

“**F**ull effort is full victory.” These were the words of Mahatma Gandhi whose efforts freed India from British rule.

Achieving your worthy goals is good, but failure to reach a goal does not necessarily mean your effort was in vain. Gandhi is saying that you will be a winner in the game of life if you give your best effort regardless of the outcome. Don't expect perfection or compare yourself to anyone, but just be the best you that you can be. A big mistake that many make in life is to compare their weaknesses to other people's strengths. It is much better to discover your own strengths and then to use them.

Who you become due to your effort is more important than what you get from it. Did your effort towards a goal make you a better human being? Did giving the best of yourself build strong character? Did you learn anything worthwhile that will help you and others? If you answered “yes” to these questions then you are victorious.

Knowing in your heart that you gave full effort will bring you a certain peace of mind and satisfaction. This is not to say that you should not desire a successful outcome. However, if

you concern yourself with the effort, the results are likely to occur. If your focus is on learning, growing and improving you will get better at anything you do. On the other hand, if you try to avoid failure and mistakes or strive for perfection, you will limit your own growth opportunities. People who fear failure often avoid the very challenges that could stretch them to new heights.

You can approach your education and life as a journey and opportunity to learn and improve yourself. Or you can only concern yourself with grades and then miss out on many learning opportunities. If you work hard and focus on learning, your grades are likely to get better as a result. Students who are overly concerned with grades and with avoiding mistakes or failure often bypass hard courses and challenging opportunities which could have provided great learning experiences. They hold back, play it safe and don't give their best so they can say, "I didn't really try." Others look at so called failures and mistakes as feedback for their self-improvement and they make a full effort for the learning experience.

Give yourself credit for making an all out effort and value the learning, growth and improvement even its small. Give the best of yourself regardless of the outcome and you will be a winner in the game of life.

The World is a Mess and What Can Be Done

As a human race we are confronted today with a multitude of major challenges. These include economic, educational, environmental and health-related problems and war scenarios and other forms of violence and inhumane actions.

Collectively we are the source of these problems. A forest is only as green as the trees in it and similarly the world is as good as the people in it. The animals, birds, fish and insects did not cause these problems and they cannot solve them. We created the problems and it is up to us to solve them if we want a better world.

One major obstacle is that many people see themselves as separate and not connected or part of the whole. It is our level of consciousness or awareness that enables us to see or not see that we have a relationship with other humans, to other species and to our planet.

When a sense of separation dominates our consciousness, then a tribal mentality is the result. Then it is us against them. Then those who think like us are accepted and others can be seen as the enemy.

Our actions reflect how we perceive ourselves, others and the world. Look at the difference in the level of consciousness and perception of Hitler and Mother Teresa. Hitler was an example of someone operating from a very low level of consciousness and Mother Teresa from a very high level. One saw through eyes of hatred and the other through eyes of love and compassion. Look at the difference in their legacies. One left behind death, suffering and destruction and the other left a legacy of love and kindness. We do not have to become like Mother Teresa, but each of us can bring our own light to the world.

Humane values come from a higher level of consciousness. Inhumane values come from a lower state of consciousness. Humane values are part of being a good human being. These are universal values such as integrity, compassion, kindness and caring for others. When we do not live in harmony with these values, chaos and suffering are the result. This is what is happening in our world today.

Mahatma Gandhi once remarked that to improve the world, “Be the change you want to see in the world.” It is up to each of us to become good human beings and to bring more good into the world. It has to start with individual self-improvement. If enough human beings are doing good then there can be a tipping point toward massive world improvement. This is how we can build a better world, clean up some of the mess and resolve some of the major world problems.

Character: The Foundation of Education

The purpose of education is to draw out the best from our students. It should be about more than just making good grades on bubble tests and making money after graduation. Education should teach students how to learn and to develop a love for life-long learning. Students need to learn to think for themselves. They need to be prepared to handle the problems they will encounter, to live purposeful lives and to learn the value of making a contribution to others and society.

Knowledge without character provides students with a weak foundation for facing the problems and temptations of life. There are many examples of intelligent and well educated people who ended up in trouble or in prison because of character defects. Humane values need to be the foundation of education. A good education should help students to develop character traits and qualities such as courage, integrity, compassion, self-regulation, honesty, resilience, humility and caring about others. Bertrand Russell put it this way, “You must believe that you can help bring about a better world. A good society is produced only by good individuals.” Our students need the skills, inspiration and character to live meaningful lives and to make a positive difference in the world.

Loving Kindness is Needed to Save the World

There are at least two major threats to the planet and our existence. One is nuclear war and the other is climate change. Government and corporate leaders and policies that value money and power over people will lead to greater destruction of the planet and all species. Putting people before money and power, will in most cases, not be initiated from the top down. Multitudes of people from the bottom up must demand a world with more loving kindness and humane values. They can express their voices when voting and in other non-violent ways.

We must shift from a tribal consciousness (only my tribe, race, political party, sexual orientation, gender, social status and religious beliefs matter) to embracing diversity. We must come to see that everyone is worth being treated with respect, dignity and kindness. And we must shift from a focus only on separation and perceive unity. Every part is related and connected to the whole. Damage to any part effects all of us.

It might take a positive change in the consciousness of multitudes to avert the dangers of nuclear war or climate

change, but each individual can make some difference. It is like the rock thrown in a pond that sends ripples throughout the water. The people who you touch in a positive way will affect others and they will influence others who will continue to affect others. In this way you multiply yourself and a long chain of your influence is formed.

Nicholas Winton is an example of the ripple effect and how one person can help many. He organized the rescue of 669 Czech and Slovak children before Hitler's troops invaded Czechoslovakia. There is a beautiful movie called "Nicky's Family" that tells his story. Nicholas Winton's family grew to over 6,000 descendants of these children before he died at 106 years old. Thousands of people would not have been born and made their contributions to the world if it had not been for his actions. It is an excellent example of the ripple effect and what one person can accomplish.

If enough people show loving kindness and say no to inhumane values we can build a better world and may be able to save ourselves and the planet from destruction.

I leave you with a song that I wrote about building a better world through loving kindness. It is called, "Can We All Come Together." Here is the link:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ibJn0fOLlxA>

Other books by Raymond Gerson

Achieve College Success: Learn How in One Semester or Less.

This book is ideal for a full-semester college success course for high schools and colleges. It is an expansion of the brief edition.

Achieve College Success: Learn How in 20 Hours or Less (Brief Edition)

Learn strategies to be a successful student in high school and college. You will learn how to achieve your goals, ways that you are intelligent, how to manage your time well, study strategies, test taking and memory skills, careers that are right for you and ideas for creating the life you want and making a positive difference.

Achieve Career Success: Discover and Get the Job You Want

This book is available both in a brief and full edition. Learn more about your best skills, talents, values and personality type. Learn how to match the right careers to yourself and then discover how to get the job you want. The full edition

can be used for a full semester career readiness course and the brief edition for shorter courses.

Create the Life You Want

Create the life you have imagined. Attract and live your dreams. You will gain insights for creating a fulfilling career, attracting the love of your life, finding a great purpose, and making a positive difference. This is a 90 minute Motivational Self-Help Short Read.

How to Create the Job You Want

Create your dream career and make it happen. This book will provide you with ideas for discovering your skills and talents. Learn how to use those discoveries to create a fulfilling job even where one did not previously exist. Develop a job or business that utilizes your natural talents.

Effective Job Search Strategies

This book contains a variety of elements for a successful job search. It includes tips on writing a resume, interviewing for a job, questions to ask during an interview, and networking strategies. A complementary resource for How to Create the Job You Want.

Reaching for a Dream

This is an inspirational novel which reflects our journey to overcome obstacles to our potential.

It will be easy for you to identify with the main character in this uplifting novel as he endeavors to transform his dreams into reality. You will gain motivation and ideas for fulfilling your own hopes and dreams.

The Greatest Opportunity

Discover treasures within yourself. This is a non-fiction book which contains inspirational ideas for inner growth and personal transformation. The purpose of the book is to provide you with motivational and practical ideas for making the best use of your life.

Note to Educators: If you order at least ten paperback books from the Achieve College and Career Success Series from <https://www.upbeatpress.com> you will receive a 20% discount.

Ebooks for *Achieve College Success* and *Achieve Career Success* are available at: <https://www.vitalsource.com>. Search for Raymond Gerson at this website.

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Tobin Quereau
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“Professor Gerson helped me figure out what my strong characteristics are, helped me set and achieve goals and achieve them. Definitely helped me decide what major I wanted.”

Former student
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