Change Your Mind

Career Development

Recently, a college friend reached out to me with an invitation to attend a weekend conference on “personal development.” Unsure of what that would entail, I asked her to send me a link to the brochure. Like many of you, I have attended numerous professional conferences to enhance my legal skillset — conferences pertaining to government contracting, exporting, and labor law to name a few. I also regularly attend the “mother” of all conferences for in-house counsel: the ACC Annual Conference. (P.S. Hope to see you all in San Francisco in October!)

In reviewing the brochure, I found that I had never heard of any of the speakers. I even reached out to my network of friend-entrepreneurs and found out that they had not heard of any of the speakers either. Based on the brochure, the conference seemed geared toward people trying to launch or grow a business. I weighed the pros and cons of attending this seemingly inapplicable event, but I finally surrendered to the right-side of my brain and decided to go. I viewed the invitation as an opportunity to spend some quality time with a friend and perhaps learn something new, even if I am quite far down the road of my career path.

In making that decision to follow Robert Frost’s “The Road Not Taken,” my thought processes were irrevocably altered. During the presentations, for the first time in many years, I started to rethink the idea of future possibilities. The main conference speaker stressed the importance of really taking time to evaluate and understand your goals. When was the last time any of us really thought about our life goals? We spend thousands of hours performing strategic planning for our companies. But have you ever applied a strategic plan to your life? Where do you (and if applicable, your family) want to be two, five, 10 years from today? When was the last time you looked for or selected a job based on what you want to do and where you want to be as opposed to who will hire you?

How many of us are living and working inside a box of our own making and don’t realize we have the

tools to build something bigger — an entire abundant life? Motivational Speaker Jim Rohn once said: “*If you don’t design your own life plan, chances are you’ll fall into someone else’s plan.* And guess what they have planned for you? Not much.”

A few years ago, as a member of leadership in ACC’s Small Law Department (SLD) Committee, I had the privilege of participating in a strategic planning meeting with SLD’s sponsor Meritas. It was exhilarating to say the least. Each person wrote down *every* idea on as many Post-It notes as he or she needed. Then, as a group, we categorized the ideas and posted them on a wall. Next we rewrote them into actual goals, then timelines, and finally actions to be taken. That strategic planning resulted in growth and great success for the SLD committee over the ensuing three years.

Reflecting on that experience, it occurred to me that this exercise could easily be applied to one’s own strategic plan for life. I shared this idea with my husband and we have decided to schedule an extended weekend retreat complete with Post-its, index cards, white board, and markers, and really think about our family’s strategic plan. I would encourage you to do the same. And, if you have a significant other, it’s recommended that you start out by writing your life goals separately, in different rooms, to then come together. This gives you a chance to dream freely. Want to be able to take month-long vacations? Put it on the list. Finally learn a second language? On the list. Work flexible hours? On the list. Write a book? Stay at home? Find a way to care for an aging parent? Travel more? Travel less? Get out of debt? On the list.

Once you have your list, refine it. Look for the barriers. Money should not be one of them.

> “It’s not a matter of ‘Can I afford to do this?’ but ‘What can I do to afford this?’”
>
> Delatorro McNeal II

Think through what actions you need to take today, tomorrow, and every day after to get to those goals. We *all* have the tools to create, execute, and realize what we really want. Our ability to pursue and live the authentic, self-chosen lives we want takes us beyond the paycheck to a real purpose.

Precious metals are refined by subjecting them to higher and higher heat to filter out the impurities. Work through the refining process by burning away doubt, irrelevant concerns, and inclinations to think negatively. Look beyond creating value for your company, create value for yourself.

> If you want to be somebody else,
> If you’re tired of fighting battles with yourself
> If you want to be somebody else
> Change your mind…
>
> From the song “Change Your Mind” by Sister Hazel

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