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2nd Deleted Chapter from the first draft of *The Not So Big Life*

By Sarah Susanka, 2007

Why Time Drives Us Nuts

Your time is limited, so don't waste it living someone else's life. Don't be trapped by dogma - which is living with the results of other people's thinking. Don't let the noise of other's opinions drown out your own inner voice. And most important, have the courage to follow your heart and intuition. They somehow already know what you truly want to become. Everything else is secondary.

--Steve Jobs

Introductory Note:

Although this chapter was eliminated from the published version of *The Not So Big Life* after the subtitle changed from "It's about Time" to "Making Room for What Really Matters", there's a lot of valuable material herein to help you look at both how you use your time, and how it is that so many of us lose awareness of how we are spending our time. In the book, and in the other omitted chapter posted recently on the website, I've spoken at length about how we misunderstand time, thinking of it as a bucket to be filled rather than as the moment to moment awareness of what IS, right Now. Some of what you read here may seem to contradict that understanding, but it provides an important step along the way to becoming fully awake in every moment by helping us see how and why we go to sleep in our daily activities without recognizing that we've done so. So as you read this new chapter, keep in mind that it is the awareness of what you are doing that is key and not the quantity of time you are gaining or losing per se.

(If you haven't read "It's About Time", you can find it at www.entsobiglife.com under the *Resources* Tab.)

Time Hogs and How to Engage Them Differently

Before we begin this chapter, a definition is in order. A “Time Hog” is anything that causes you to lose awareness, so that you end up spending a lot longer than you had planned in the involvement with the particular activity or engagement.

There are so many time hogs vying for our attention today, from text messages, to emails, to phone calls that by day’s end we are frequently overwhelmed, frustrated, and totally exhausted. Yet the next day we do it again. And again the day after that, with no end in sight to the onslaught. But it’s not just two-way communications that are creating the downpour. It’s anything that bombards us with information. I’m most attuned to this issue as it relates to TV because I spent a substantial chunk of my life without one. But it can be true of everything from newspapers to magazines to junk mail. It all depends on what you permit yourself to get lost in.

The problem with so much of what arrives in our mailboxes and over our various screens is that it lures us into a dream world that isn’t of our choosing, which causes us to lose all awareness of time. We choose to watch or read only because it is in front of us, and we’re on autopilot as we turn the page, push the on button, or click on the link. Rarely do we stop and ask ourselves, “Is this really what I want to do right now?” Yet once we’ve turned, pushed, or clicked, we’re hooked, as we become engaged in the storyline of the world depicted therein. This is the primary mechanism by which our time is consumed without our awareness. We are literally lured, unsuspecting, into other people’s dream worlds.

This is the fundamental principle behind advertising, but it’s happening in more ways than we imagine—not just those things that we recognize as commercials. Everyone is trying to get our attention, and have us focus on *their* dream world. With all the devices available to do this these days, if we aren’t aware of what’s going on, we are literally led by the nose from one mindless engagement to another, none of which interests us particularly, and all of which ensure that we stay sound asleep in the middle of our waking dream.

1. TV

The first major time hog to enter the world of consensus reality showed up in the first half of the 20th Century, bringing images and entertainment to households across the world, through the invention of the cathode ray tube—soon dubbed

the television. It was initially greeted with skepticism, its detractors predicting its popularity would be short-lived. Those nay-sayers couldn't have been more wrong, as we know now.

My father—a natural born inventor and lover of gadgets and gizmos—built his own television at the age of eleven, long before most households had access to the new communications device. So for him, television has always been associated with a certain kind of wonder and delight. He could always envision the remarkable potential of the medium both as an educational tool and as entertainment, and he has tried his best over the course of his life to make it live up to that potential.

As his child though, despite his best efforts to provide us with only the highest quality of programming, I grew to resent the television's intrusion on times that would otherwise have been quiet and open to being filled with conversation and creative activities. I found it difficult to write or to do homework, for example, even when the TV was in a different room and the door was closed. It hogged the airwaves, making it nearly impossible to put together a coherent thought about anything other than what was being broadcast at that particular moment.

So, unlike the majority of the population who perceive TV as a way of chilling out at the end of a day, my conditioning caused me to want to turn it off. And when I moved away from home, that's exactly what I did. For almost twenty years I didn't watch TV at all. Although I did own a television for the first ten of those years, almost every time I turned it on to see if there was anything worth watching, I became frustrated because it seemed to me that the programming was, by and large, so simplistic, and the content so watered down that I felt almost suffocated by trivia. As a lover of the written word, I preferred to read when I had time to myself at the end of the day. That way I was able to choose from the multitude of books whose subjects intrigued me at any particular time. So what I did with my free time was supporting and supplementing my passions of the moment.

I tell you this not because I'm proposing that everyone permanently turn off their TV sets, but because of what I learned once I started to watch TV regularly again a few years ago. I can tell you that my experiencing within my waking dream has a different quality to it now than it had before. There is the impression of less free time because the period of watching TV each day seems almost to evaporate, as though it had never existed. That time is not available for doing the things I would really like to have time for. And what we end up watching is

very rarely about something I would choose to read about, or have any particular interest in. The content of the programming available—even with all the channels we have at our fingertips today—seems extremely limited, sometimes boring, often repetitious (as we get a review after every commercial break of the preceding segments), and generally mind-numbing. Perhaps that is its purpose, but is this what we really want to be doing with the precious little free time we have?

Many people have responded as I did for all those years, and have turned the television off. But others have not, spending night after night channel surfing, as they try to find something worth watching, and then often watching two programs on different channels simultaneously so that they can avoid having to wait through the commercials for their program to resume. When you stop and think about it, the whole pattern of behavior is absurd, but since the medium is so addicting its very difficult to turn off or engage differently, even when we recognize this absurdity. At least in recent years the advent of DVRs and TiVo have allowed a little more awareness to enter into the equation, so that now there can be a conscious selection of what to watch and when. But prior to this we were essentially at the mercy of whatever was being beamed to our living rooms at that particular moment.

In many ways, TV is a lot like thought. The TV dream world is a collective one rather than one that is apparently only in your own head, as thoughts are. But there's the same fascination involved, and the same difficulty in letting go. TV's equivalent of letting the thought go is to turn the set off, or at least change the channel, but the allure of what will happen next is often almost insurmountable.

I find now that, though my mind is filled with more images of what is happening in the world each day, I'm not better informed. In fact, if anything I'm less well informed, and the world seems to have shrunk to the United States, the latest world conflict hot spot, a lot of fear, and not much of anything else. Where I used to receive most of my news from the radio each day by listening to NPR on my way home from work, now I get it from CNN. Both mediums depict world events with a particular slant and so both are coloring how I perceive the world, but the radio version delivers more information in a shorter period of time and seems significantly less sensationalized.

My commute home used to take me twenty-five minutes and that provided me with a sense of what was going on around the world. Now the amount of time it takes to absorb the same quantity of news is significantly longer, and the quality

is lower, mostly because the images are so addicting. TV producers know and make the most of the fact that the imagery is more fascinating than the actual information content. They want our attention for as long as they can keep it, and if sensational images with their accompanying emotional stories are what it takes, then that's what they'll give us. Something violent or outrageous occurs before cameras somewhere, and we are shown the film clip over and over again. We look aghast at what we are being shown, and we're willing to watch it repeatedly because our adrenals are engaged, and the boost they give us makes us, for those few moments, feel more alert.

Like negative thoughts, the images hook us in, and cause us to loop and loop with no way out of the cage. We don't see that we've created the cage ourselves, and that we are simply watching a movie of someone else's waking dream, (which has now become our own), projected through a black box that's sitting in our primary living space. That black box is often akin to a rude guest who has poor taste, no manners, and has not only overstayed its welcome, but has moved in and decided to take over the management of the household.

Is this what we really want? Why are so many of us doing this? Are we really such slaves to adrenaline and to the collective dream? For many people who've grown up with television as the primary activity of their evenings, they literally can't imagine what they would do without it. There's only one way to find out. Turn it off. Try it for a week, and see what shifts in your life. Though you may believe that without it you will be out of touch with the world, there are plenty of other mechanisms available to keep you informed. Watching television, for most of us, is just another conditioned pattern, and just like the other conditionings we've discussed throughout this book, the only way to break the conditioning is to change the pattern by going towards what you are rejecting. You can't think your way there. You have to do it. If you are worried about what to engage in instead, make a list of the things you wish you had time for in your life right now, and pick any one of them. Just because you aren't used to thinking of your evenings as a time to do these kinds of activities, it doesn't mean you can't. It's just that you never have. So give it a try and see what happens.

The most pronounced difference between my no-television days and my present experience is that I'm now aware that, according to most television programming, we're on the way to hell in a hand basket, we're never safe, and we're surrounded by people who look like you and me, but who have evil intentions. According to what we absorb from TV, there's danger everywhere. It sounds like a nightmare to me, and one I'd rather wake up from than keep

subjecting myself to night after night. I never used to feel this. And I rarely experienced danger or hostility. Now, although I don't buy into them, I see images of this vision of reality constantly. But the world I live in today is actually no different than it was five years ago, pre-TV. What has changed is my way of learning about what's happening beyond my personal interactions. I now participate more in the *collective* waking dream.

So why, you may ask, am I watching any TV at all if I dislike it so much? It's because I have a reaction to it, so by watching TV I am actually going towards that which I am rejecting. Little by little, the disdain is shifting. There are things we watch once in a while that have value. For example, watching *Wife Swap*, an ABC reality TV program whose title initially convinced me I would hate it, proved quite enlightening, and a good exemplar of what I've described throughout *The Not So Big Life*, related to habitual patterns.

The program's premise is that by taking two wives out of their current home settings, and having them switch households for two weeks, almost all of their conditioned patterns become immediately obvious and called into question by the new family. To make the patterns all the more pronounced, in each episode the two families selected are polar opposites of one another.

During the first week of the swap each new wife must live as her counterpart normally lives. She must live the other wife's schedule exactly (all but conjugal duties, of course), complete with sleeping schedule, cleaning, childcare, and work patterns. But with the advent of the second week, it is her turn to prescribe a new set of rules that the rest of the household must now comply with. As you might imagine, there's reactivity all over the place. No one in either household ever likes the new rules initially, but over the course of the two weeks, by living differently, both the wives and the families are able to taste a different way of doing things. Just these small shifts in behavior over a brief period of time almost always change the lives of the original households from there on out. And for the viewer, it becomes instantly obvious that the reason we don't change our conditioned patterns by ourselves is because we don't see them, and we don't know how much they hold us back from a different and potentially more fulfilling way of living.

So I use this television-inspired example, which has been made accessible to me by breaking my own conditioned pattern of *not* watching TV, to encourage you to break your own conditioned patterning related to TV. If you watch TV often, turn it off for a week. If you don't watch TV much, turn it on and watch it for a

couple of hours each night for a week. And then see what you notice about yourself, and about how you inhabit your life. The long-term answer for each of us is different. And for most of us it's not either polarity—no TV at one end and constant TV at the other; it's somewhere in between. The point is to make that determination consciously, with awareness, based on what you actually want, and not simply because the act of turning it on or keeping it off is a habit. That is what it means to go to sleep in the waking dream. You aren't aware of the choice you are making, so it really isn't a choice at all.

For many years I have believed that as soon as the internet provides us with the option of selecting whatever we want to watch at any moment from all previous programming ever made, we'll see a huge shift in what people actually choose to watch, and a huge shift in what new programming is made from that point on. There will then be the freedom to do what I currently do with the books I choose to read. We'll be able to pick from the things that are of interest to us right now, as opposed to a limited selection of topics based upon the beliefs and projections of those in charge of developing programming. Free choice will change the picture dramatically.

Given how rapidly technological advances are being made today, it wouldn't surprise me if, by the 2008 Holiday Season, these new TV/Internet devices will be readily available, and the shift will be in the works. And we'll finally be living the potential that my father has so firmly believed in for all these years. But it will be a very different stripe of zebra than we're watching right now, and it will feed us well if we use it appropriately, rather than further enmeshing us in the present consensus reality, and lulling us to sleep as it does now.

2. The Internet

The next time hog to enter the fray showed up somewhere in the early nineties and caught on like wild fire. Most of us in the working world had at least a rudimentary desk top computer set up by this point, and were word processing and spread-sheeting like crazy; but we weren't able to talk to one another and share documents with one another except by fax or snail mail. It always boggles my mind when I realize this. I can hardly imagine what my life would be like without it now, but prior to this time it hadn't occurred to me, or anyone I worked with for that matter, that there was something even better and even faster than faxing.

It was only a little over a dozen years ago that I got my first modem, and signed on for the first time to the World Wide Web as a brand new Prodigy subscriber. I

didn't even really understand what it was at the time, but with my first visit to a Prodigy Bulletin Board, I was hooked. I remember I wanted to know something about the Celts at the time. I can't recall precisely the piece of arcane information I was seeking, but I decided to post a note on a Prodigy bulletin board, asking if anyone had any suggestions for books I could look up on the subject. Within a few minutes not only did I have suggestions for three books I might want to purchase, but I'd also been given the precise piece of information I was wanting to look up in those books. I'd instantly been connected with four of five experts in all things Celt. I was astounded and completely intoxicated by the discovery of this newfound connecting capability.

That was also the day that my then husband started to see a lot less of me. Not only was I hooked. I was obsessed. I couldn't stop looking and asking, and investigating my interests. It was heady stuff, and seemed at the time far more interesting than just another conversation with the man I'd married. I felt vaguely guilty, but I couldn't stop.

I often wondered why I was so absorbed. It was like discovering an entirely new dimension of thinking. I could wonder about anything at all, write a note on an internet bulletin board and get instant feedback from apparent experts. This was taking place during the time that I was just beginning to explore my inner world, so the allure of corresponding with other spiritual seekers was enormous. Whether I wanted to explore Zen or Tibetan Buddhism, Christianity, or Judaism, Islam, or Hinduism, Sufism, or you name it, it was all there. There were deeply meaningful exchanges going on constantly and I could both read without comment—one-way communication, or participate—two-way communication, and learn from people who were attempting to understand themselves in much the same way that I was doing, each through the lens of their particular tradition.

Around this same time—the mid to late nineties, out came a movie that described an increasingly familiar scenario for people around the globe. *"You've Got Mail"*, starring Meg Ryan and Tom Hanks, perfectly depicts the delectable mysteriousness and secrecy of an engagement with an anonymous paramour. The familiar sound, for AOL subscribers at least, of the jingle announcing the arrival of an email, is the human equivalent of a peanut delivered to a laboratory rat after performing a task successfully. Conditioning at its finest. As you watch the movie, it is almost impossible not to feel the same exhilaration at the arrival of each new message.

The two movie characters carry on an increasingly romantic and self-revelatory dialogue, replicating the pattern of behavior now so common on desktops of otherwise lonely people looking for a sense of greater meaning in their lives. The seduction of the internet is that it is possible for almost everyone to find another to share their deepest thoughts and feelings with. What these correspondents are really looking for is a sense of self, but the way they look for it is through reflection, through finding someone willing to play the two way communication game with them, though at a safe distance, and without the requirement of revealing either the official identity, the name, or the surface packaging—the physical form.

At least that's how it starts. But it is oh so easy to believe that your anonymous friend knows and understands you better than anyone else in the world. That's because you are able to read into each response whatever you want to. You can project anything at all onto that invisible other. You can't see their face, or their body language. You can't hear the inflections in their voice. All you have is the words on the screen, and those can be interpreted in hundreds of ways. So we see what we want to see, and believe what we want to believe. That's what Meg Ryan's character does, and she only discovers toward the end of the movie that the person that she's head over heels in love with in her email world is in fact the very same person whose guts she has been hating in her "real" world experience.

In addition to the illusion of true intimacy, these email trysts are also another flavor of time hogger. For those with this particular version of internet addiction, the number of times a day you feel the desire to check your email box is without bounds. The peanut might be there. Better go check.

Now that nearly all internet users in the working world have either DSL, cable, or satellite internet access, most people keep their email box open all day every day, and respond instantly to every peanut that arrives—no matter the source. They don't notice that they are much less present in their primary activity than they were before this practice became the norm.

That situation is made even worse when there's also Instant Messaging going on. A couple of years ago I was being interviewed by a young woman who was required, by her boss, to reply instantly to every question and query she I-M'd her. It was absolutely the worst interview I've ever been a part of. Every couple of minutes she would say, "Oh excuse me, I just have to respond to this question". Ten seconds later she'd have her attention back on me, but she could no longer remember what I'd just answered, so the flow of ideas was completely

shattered. There were probably seven or eight such interruptions in a twenty minute period, and when I got off the phone I felt exhausted and frustrated. Real communication had not occurred.

Nowadays I-Mers are a little more savvy. They typically don't cop to their behind the scenes I-Ming to those who aren't involved, but I know from friends and colleagues that it is now normal practice to be I-Ming during conference calls and meetings. When you ask an I-Mer a question during such a meeting, there will be a pause and an awkward silence as the person tries to reconstruct from memory what was being talked about while they were engaged in their separate conversation via the dialog box on their screen. It's the adult version of personal note-writing during class in grade school. Remember how much you learned during those classes? The same will be true of the meeting you are attending. What's the point of listening if you are not really there?

The odd part is that we don't really appreciate that we're NOT there. We think just being in attendance is enough, and then we decide we're bored and need to do something else as well to keep our minds occupied, or to get something else on the "to do" list completed simultaneously. But the fact is that if you are not present in what you are engaging, you are guaranteed not to get much out of it other than frustration, because the place that the vitality emerges from is the unfolding moment. If you aren't there, how can it reveal itself?

This kind of multi-tasking is another highly addictive behavior pattern because it's filled to the brim with adrenaline, thanks to the speed required, and it makes you feel more wanted, and so more important, on many levels. You are attending the meeting, so your attention is desired. You are then, concurrently, answering emails as they arrive, which make you a bit more important. And finally you are I-Ming with a select few, who are your real friends (or so you believe), with whom you share a secret running commentary on life happenings in real time. That's a lot of busy-ness, and busy-ness equates to importance, so you must really be something. But the busy-ness is only a substitute for real significance, remember, so all it is really doing is giving you a temporary adrenaline high. It doesn't last, and at the end of the day you feel totally drained and dejected and don't understand why.

It's because you are not showing up in your own life. There's nobody home—only a lot of rushing. Even the rushing is mental rather than physical for a lot of today's work force. Think about it. You are sitting at your desk with an earpiece in your ear, staring at a screen, and moving your fingers around a bunch of keys

on a keyboard. Why should this be so exhausting? It is because of all the thinking and racing going on. And ninety percent of it is entirely unnecessary because it is self-generated. No one is making you do this. You do it because you can, and you've never considered not doing it. That's what happens when you are on automatic. You are soundly asleep, and completely oblivious to the fact.

I may sound harsh, but I'm trying to bring about some awareness of the magnitude of the problem. If you see yourself in any of the above scenarios, you might want to try out a different behavior pattern, just for a few days, to see what difference it makes. If you are used to keeping your email box open all the time and answering every message right away, try something different. You could for example open it every two hours, and set aside twenty minutes thereafter to answer all the new emails before continuing with what you need to get done today. Or, if your job offers you this kind of flexibility, you might open it only twice a day, once when you get to work in the morning, and once shortly before you leave. Or, like me, you could open it only after you've accomplished your primary objectives for the day. If you are a frequent I-Mer, make yourself some rules, such as, "I'll only I-M when I'm fully engaged in the I-M conversation, and not otherwise," or "I'll only I-M after a meeting or conference call is over, not during". The effects of any of these small changes will astound you. You'll find yourself starting to relax a bit, and you'll feel more centered and less stressed.

The internet and the web are without question astoundingly wonderful tools, but, just like any other tool, we need to learn how to use them appropriately, and not to let them run us as is happening right now. If you stop and consider for a moment the number of new communications tools that have come on the scene in the last twenty years, and if you appreciate that the rate at which new tools are coming on the market is increasing almost exponentially, we'll quite literally go crazy if we don't get this figured out—if we don't learn the appropriate use of the tools at our disposal. There's absolutely no way we'll be able to keep up. We're having a hard enough time now, and it can only get worse as the number of tools increases.

Without understanding the "one thing at a time" dictum, we'll be living a new form of self-inflicted schizophrenia, where we won't be able to distinguish between any of the voices speaking at us, and won't know what to do next. The tools we're inventing to help us cope will, in fact, be taking us down and rendering us impotent. The illusion will be complete, and we'll be completely

lost in a chaotic nightmare of our own making. Turn off all the screens and see how quiet it gets. It's amazing.

3. Transportable Internet Communications Devices

In preparation for this category of time hogger, I've been interviewing friends and colleagues about the various features of their toys of choice...from cell phones to BlackBerrys to Treos to iPhones to iPods to Xboxes to PlayStations...the list goes on and on. Originally I'd planned to write a section for each generic type of tool, but gradually some realizations dawned on me, not the least of which was a fear that this chapter would go on forever.

As I enumerated the various devices through which we get overly busy, and so more lost in the dream, and as I evaluated what subjects to address under which category of device, I was struck by the fact that all these wireless internet communications tools are merging. As the internet connects every one of them to every other, all the various modalities are becoming accessible from any one of them. This is undoubtedly more than obvious to those creating the abundance of new tools, but I suspect to most of us users, it hasn't quite hit home yet. We're just trying to keep up with the technological Jones's by staying one gizmo ahead. And it's in the gizmo creators' best interests to keep us looking forward to the next improvement, rather than seeing the smoke and mirrors wizardry behind their inventions.

What brought this to mind was a conversation I had recently with my stepson. He is in his mid-twenties, and has grown up with computers, the internet and gaming as key ingredients in his life. I was asking him to explain to me what an Xbox and a PlayStation really do, and he told me something I hadn't realized before. He said that up until relatively recently there was a schism between the way you play an internet game, versus the way you play a game using the TV as the play screen. The TV game consoles use a controller, and so give the gamer greater flexibility of movement and agility, while the internet games, which have been, by and large, more challenging and cutting edge, have been limited by the means of movement—the use of the mouse and up/down, left/right keys.

What the new generation of gaming technology allows through wireless internet technology is access to the more sophisticated internet games, now projected through the TV screen, and allowing controller agility. So the best of both worlds is now available through a linking device—the Xbox, or PlayStation. The same thing is happening with computers, MP3 players, and cell phones. What are BlackBerrys, iPhones and the like, really? They are doing the same thing as

the new gaming devices. They're linking worlds. A cell phone is no longer just a cell phone, and a computer is no longer just a computer. Depending upon your favorite forms of communication and engagement with the internet world, you can get a tool that now mingles the features you want. Before long, we'll all be carrying devices that automatically contain all of them, and we won't even think about it, just as my cell-phone now allows me to take photos and surf the internet even though I hardly ever utilize these functions from the cell phone. Those features simply come standard now.

What we currently think of as a TV will do the same. It will include internet access, MP3 player—undoubtedly with cool light shows to accompany music, access to all films and TV programming ever made, and all games in existence. The home theatre will become a more and more realistic imitation of real life, with not only surround sound, but surround image, and surround sensation, until eventually—just like Star Trek's holodeck—you'll be able to create complete worlds for yourself to experience. You'll then be able to watch yourself making your own waking dream. You'll be 100% aware that you are both the dreamer and the dream creator.

It's really not that far from a reality today. There are in fact games that allow you to don shock pads, glasses, and gloves that stimulate the body to create the impression of your actual presence in the virtual world. You are quite literally putting on a new skin around that of your physical body in order to separate you from this reality and create the impression of another. Serious players take on an identity, which they keep with them, no matter what game they are playing. Thanks to the internet, they are able to play with a virtual community spread across the world. Location in this physical reality is irrelevant. Players have a rating, just like Olympic athletes, and are placed in a hierarchy based on the performance of their particular identity. And there's a vibrant form of commerce between characters in many games. Players can buy game rewards and acquisitions from each other with real money, even though the thing they are buying has absolutely no market value to anyone not in the game, and even though what they are buying is virtual—it doesn't exist in three dimensional reality.

I've also been told that gaming can be extremely seductive, and can dramatically alter your experience of time in this non-virtual version of the waking dream. One player told me that upon emerging from the game, he often finds that his hand is cramped, and he desperately needs to evacuate his bladder; but until that moment of emergence he hadn't been aware of the fact because he was so

absorbed in the game. That's the only reality that exists for him while he's playing. When he has friends over, the way they engage is through the game. There are few words that pass between them outside the game. This is where relating happens, and it's a relating based on challenges, achievements and high adrenaline encounters. Three hours, he told me, can evaporate like the blink of an eye, and yet in his virtual world he's been building a civilization and time has meant something entirely different. He doesn't consider himself a heavy duty player. He told me that on average he only plays one to two hours a day, unlike some of his friends who are completely obsessed with their game of choice, and play as much as eight to ten hours a day.

This may strike us as crazy, but isn't this similar to what happens to you when you sit in front of your computer all day and answer emails ad infinitum; or when you check incessantly for messages on your BlackBerry? Doesn't your experience of time shift when you've become lost in the desire to empty that email box, and don't you suddenly come to, realizing that you really, really need to go to the bathroom? I know my experience of time changes pretty dramatically. Even if these particular accoutrements are unfamiliar in your waking dream, you almost certainly have an equivalent. Just ask yourself what you tend to get lost in and you'll find your version of the same phenomenon.

And isn't the purchase of virtual treasures a perfect analogy for the stock market, or for our currency? We give each other a piece of paper with green ink and pictures on it, and we completely accept that this has a particular value--\$5, \$20, \$100. Why do we accept it? Because we *all* accept it. We have attributed a meaning to a game piece—the buck—and we can't at this point even entertain that it is really a consensus reality imagining. But it is in fact just as ephemeral, just as virtual, as the virtual game treasure being purchased from one game player by another. That's why the stock market crash of 1929 was so devastating. It brought into people's awareness for at least a few years that the only reason the monetary system works is because we all believe it works. When we lose that conviction and trust, lo and behold, it doesn't work any more. Pretty scary stuff.

So the real challenge, whatever your game of choice, whether it comes in the form of a communications device, a virtual game, or an MP3 player, is to notice your own obsessive behavior related to it, and to go toward its opposite for a while. Turn it off for a week and experience the withdrawal. Watch what that precipitates in your life as a result. We are familiar with the concept of withdrawal related to drugs and alcohol—two forms of addiction that we

consider socially unacceptable—but there are thousands of other addictions that haven't yet been recognized as such, but which alter our experiencing of life in equally profound ways. Literally anything you are addicted to, however innocuous or inconsequential it may seem, is food for growth. By shifting your behavior patterns in order to become less dependent upon it, or by giving it up all together, you'll be embracing the obvious next step in your own evolution.

The fact is that we are constantly creating our game. The internet is simply giving us a view into how the creation process happens because in its lightning speed development and proliferation, it's a challenge just to keep up. We can actually experience a form of disorientation similar to that of learning a new card or board game. Until you become familiar with the moves and objectives, and until you've mastered the rules and don't have to think about them any more, you are hyper-conscious of the fact that you are playing a game and have the option of stepping out of the fray if you can't master it. But once you get good at it, you want to keep playing because it provides you with a new way of obtaining peanuts—little droplets of “feel good about yourself” juice.

So when you look at the lives of a virtual gamers and think of them with contempt for wasting all that time and being so lost in their game, realize that that is also you. Your game is simply an older game, and one that you are completely used to—so used to in fact that you don't even know the rules are rules any more. You simply believe that's the way things are.