

The Not So Big Life

Chapter Ten: Moving Into Your Not So Big Life

Your Turn: Follow Your Dreams

Think back to your childhood, teens, or early adulthood, and recall what kinds of dreams you had for yourself back then. What did you enjoy most? What did you excel at? Did you have a vision of what you might become as an adult? Did you have a hobby or favorite activity? Take a few minutes to write down in your notebook all the things that come to mind.

Now recognize that it's not too late still to pursue these things. They may need to take a different form than you'd imagined them when you were younger, but if you are passionate about something, there's always a way. Simply paying attention to these passions will bring forth opportunities to pursue them.

Your Turn: Rope Pushing

Where, in your past or present behavior, have you engaged in rope pushing? What kinds of situations evoke this response in you? Are there recognizable patterns to these occasions? Has rope pushing ever resulted in your getting what you wanted faster? Or has it been an exercise in futility? Next time the reflex to push the rope arises, try letting go and see what happens instead. Write down your observations about how this experience differs from what normally occurs when you push the rope.

Your Turn: Intentions

Write down in your notebook any intentions you've been aware of over the last couple of years. Have any of these intentions been negatively stated—as in "I don't want...?" What has been the result of each of your intentions so far?

If you are not aware of having had any explicit intentions recently, is there some longing you're aware of that could point toward your heart's true desire?

Once you have these identified, pick the one you consider most important to you, and look for ways of widening the perspective from which the intention is stated. As you do this, attempt to make it only about you, rather than a wish for something or someone else.

That's all for now. In the next chapter you'll learn how to use what you've written down, to observe opportunities that come your way in response to your intention.

Your Turn: Disobedience

Name some situations from your past in which you were not obedient to the situation, where you were determined to get your way, or refused to do something that was being asked of you. (I'm not referring to dangerous, painful or hurtful things here, but to things that you felt you knew better about, on principle). How did these situations turn out? Can you imagine what would have happened if you had simply done what was being asked of you? Have you ever asked yourself how you can know what would have happened?

Are there any situations in your life right now in which you are being asked to do something that you really don't want to do (again, omitting dangerous or painful activities)? If so, how do you know what would happen if you simply did what was being asked of you? What is stopping you from being obedient to the situation?

Try doing what is being asked of you, and write down, over the next few days and weeks, what happens as a result.

Your Turn: What Do I Refuse To Do?

Make a list of your own rejections and refusals. The following question may help you to access them: "What are the things in my life that I absolutely refuse to do?" (Once again, we're not including dangerous or hurtful activities.) Can you identify the hidden beliefs that fuel these refusals? How would your life change if you went toward the thing or things you are refusing to do? As opportunities to do so present themselves, try embracing that which you are rejecting, and see what happens.

Your Turn: Watching the Multi-Tasker

Stay aware of multi-tasking behaviors. If you are used to keeping your email in-box open all the time, and answering every message right away, try something different. Open it every two hours, and set aside twenty minutes to answer all the new emails, before continuing with what you need to get done today. Or, if your job offers you enough latitude, 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 IM-er, make yourself some rules, such as, "I'll only IM when I'm fully engaged in the IM conversation," or "I'll only IM 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, to feel less stressed and more centered.

Exercise: Changing Your Behavior

The following exercise will sound deceptively simple, but it's not an easy one to assign yourself because it requires shifting patterns of your own behavior that may be unknown to you. When I first started working with Jan, she gave me this assignment, and it profoundly affected how I experienced my daily life. She identified three patterns of behavior that she asked me to change for a period of nine months. Once she named these patterns I recognized my attachment to them, but until that moment I had been unaware of how much each one defined who I took myself to be. The three things she identified were:

1. You always wear long skirts. No more skirts.
2. You have worn your hair long for many years. Cut your hair.
3. You have a glass of wine when you return home from work each day. No more alcohol *after* 5:00 pm.

The three assignments proved to be brilliant catalysts for change, not only in these patterns of behavior, but in my entire self-image. When she first gave me the exercise, I didn't own a pair of pants. I had to go to the store that afternoon to buy a couple of pairs. I'd never really thought of it until that moment, but my self-image was deeply attached to its skirt collection. The hair assignment wasn't so easy. I went to the local hair salon and got my hair cut, but the thought of losing all of its length broke my heart. It became very obvious that I was more than a little attached to long locks. In fact, though I had a good six inches cut off, I really didn't fulfill the assignment as completely as I could have. Knowing what I know now, I should have cut it really short, just to experience the full contrast.

But by far the cleverest behavior change Jan prescribed was the requirement that I drink no alcohol after 5:00 pm. What she knew about me was that I was a very busy person, and not likely to take a sip before 5:00 pm, but telling me implicitly that I *could* do so meant that I wouldn't feel deprived. I'd been wanting to put a stop to this wine habit for some time, not because I drank too much, but because I'd noticed that it dulled my senses ever so slightly. Her assignment provided a solution overnight, a result that both amazed and delighted me. The quality of my evenings changed dramatically simply because I was more alert.

All these changes allowed me to experience firsthand that my ideas about how I "am" are quite arbitrary, and that by making even small changes to these behavior patterns, big shifts will occur all by themselves. In this way we can turn the tables on our habits, transforming them into vehicles for some significant personal growth. As you begin to

identify your own habits, you may find that some you perceive as conscious, practical choices, while others you have no good rationale for. Either kind of habit will work in this exercise, since even those habits you think you've adopted for purely utilitarian purposes will in all likelihood prove to be more than that. What you'll discover, whichever habits you change, is that everything you do affects both how you perceive yourself, and how others perceive you.

Without the ability to see yourself objectively though, it's often difficult to know what behaviors to choose in order to affect the greatest shift, so I've devised a way to help you identify them, even when you don't have someone like Jan to select them for you. Before proceeding further, write your answers to each of the following questions on a separate sheet of paper.

Regarding clothing and appearance:

- Do you always or predominantly wear one color of clothing? If so, what color?
- Do you always or predominantly wear a particular article of clothing, such as a hat, a scarf, or a tie? If so, what is that article?
- Do you always or predominantly wear one type of apparel, such as skirts, pants, shorts, tank tops, vests, boots etc.? If so, what is that type?
- Are there other clothing patterns you are aware of that aren't covered by the above questions?
- Do you always wear your hair a certain length or a certain way?
- If you're a man, do you have facial hair?
- Do you always or never wear makeup? If so, which?

Regarding morning routines:

- Do you habitually read the paper each morning?
- Do you habitually watch the news or morning shows on TV?
- Do you habitually listen to the radio as you go about your day?
- Do you habitually check your computer email, or surf the internet?
- Do you habitually have a cup of coffee or tea to wake yourself up each day?
- Do you habitually sit in the same location to drink that drink or to eat your breakfast?
- Do you go through any particular pattern of food preparation each morning? If so, what is that pattern?
- Do you typically eat the same thing each morning? If so what is that?
- Are you typically late as you leave for work? If so why, and what needs to change to make this not so?
- Are you typically frustrated as you leave for work? If so why, and what needs to change to make this not so?

- Are there other patterns of behavior that you are aware of that aren't covered by the above questions?

Regarding evening routines:

- Do you habitually read the paper each evening?
- Do you habitually watch the news or particular shows on TV?
- Do you habitually have the TV on during the evening hours? If so, how much of the time are you actually watching?
- Do you habitually listen to the radio as you go about your evening activities?
- Do you habitually check your computer email, or surf the internet? If so, for how long?
- Do you habitually have a drink or munch on a favorite snack food each evening?
- Do you habitually sit in the same location to drink that drink or to eat that snack?
- Do you go through any particular pattern of food preparation each evening? If so, what is that pattern?
- Do you typically eat the same thing each evening? If so what is that?
- Do you typically watch TV or read while you eat?
- Do you typically clean up after a meal in the same way?
- Do you clean up right away after a meal?
- Do you put off cleaning up until later?
- Are you typically late home from work? If so why, and what needs to change to make this not so?
- Are you typically frustrated as you return home from work? If so why, and what needs to change to make this not so?
- Are there other patterns of behavior that you are aware of that aren't covered by the above questions?

Now that you have your answers to these questions down on paper, identify which of these things you are most attached to by rating them from 1 to 5, with 5 being the most attached, and 1 being least so. Remember, it doesn't matter whether you think you practice the habit for a good reason or not. What you do at this point will determine how much change you want to effect in your waking dream. Pick three habitual patterns to change, preferably one from each category, and you are to stick with that change for nine months.

The goal here is to pick things that will really create some tension for you. The more attached you are to the habit, the more profound the effect will be on your waking dream. So, if you pick three items with a "5" rating, prepare to be challenged, but know that by doing so, you'll be precipitating the most change in your life. If you pick three

items with a “1” rating, you won’t experience a lot of challenge; you’ll still see an effect, just not as big a one.

If you have difficulty in identifying behaviors you are attached to, even after going through the above list, I recommend that you ask a friend who knows you well and whom you trust to help you. Friends that can support you in the process of self-discovery are invaluable assets. A true friend is someone who will tell you what you need to hear, not what you want to hear. They are the people in your life that see your highest potential, and not those who coddle your self-image, even though that might make you feel better in the short run. The more you can be with true friends—the ones helping you to live into the realization of your true self—the more direct will be the journey.

Because everything we do is related to everything else, change in one part of our lives affects all the other parts as well. This exercise is the most effective way I know to start to see how the waking dream shifts as you change the way you act within it. For this exercise to be effective, you have to be a firm parent, and not allow yourself to slip back into your established patterns. But that’s all you have to do. The rest will happen all by itself. Have fun, and don’t be discouraged if you backslide from time to time. Just continue without judging yourself too harshly. The way you’re doing it is just right. This is an excellent example of how to be a director in your own movie--not by changing the content, but by being in that content differently.