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Coaching the Executive Spirit: A Guide to Our Inner Talents

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Within each of us there are basic forces that not only form who we are, but also drive us in powerful ways to be who we are. For some, there is ease in naming and identifying those forces. For some the task is less clear and perhaps even a bit uncomfortable. In truth all people have core values and beliefs. These values and beliefs form the basis of choices and decision making. They form the basis for every aspect of our lives. By learning what matters most to ourselves we can better understand and ultimately guide where we intend to go on life's path; furthermore, as we see what makes us "tick," we can also discover the special talents and abilities that we possess.

"But I'm not a spiritual person," Deborah Schwartz said as she shifted from one side of the chair to the other. Pictures of family sat to the side of the desk and a small bookcase leaned against the wall. Over the book case several certificates, commendations and plaques of recognition for service hung with pride. Imagine this scene. How often have we been on one side or the other of the desk in an identical office? After all, in the business world we think with our minds and not our emotions. We are driven by data and facts, not the intangible. Is that really so? Can and do we truly act without being under any sort of influence from our emotional selves? Even if we shunt emotion to the side, it is still there somewhere. Looking back at our talented executive, we know that the very arrangement of items in her office suggests that there are inherent forces within her that indeed influence her every move. These forces needn't be looked upon as silly, superstitious, or "emotional." Rather they should be viewed as the core of the person we are and a source of inner strength that can take us ever farther than imagined. Our executive is truly driven by her core beliefs.

Just what are our core beliefs and how do we identify them? Some are quite clear and readily discernable. Returning to Deborah Schwartz, there are a number of clear core beliefs she exhibits just by viewing her office. They are (1) commitment to family, (2) commitment to community, and (3) commitment to knowledge. The clues are obvious: the photos, plaques, and bookcase. Imagine your office at work or den at home. What does it tell about you? Most of us have a workspace not so different than Ms. Schwartz. There are those who are not so much into "decorating," but most people have a photo of family members or close friends on their wall or desk and other indications of what is important. Our workspaces tell much about us. Take yourself on a mental (or even a walking) tour of your co-workers'

workspaces. What clues does the physical environment give about them? Perhaps there is a coffee mug from an alma mater, a golf putter sitting in the corner, a model racing car on a desk or a travel poster of an exotic destination on the wall. We will return to explore specific aspects of discovering what is within us later on. For now, the bottom line is that even something as routine as our office reveals that there is great depth to each of us.

We are people of depth and core beliefs. So what? Our parents taught us right from wrong and we have a pretty good notion of fair play. Evildoers truly are rare, that's why they make headlines. Yet there is more to our needs than just the basics. There is a reason that the "self-help" and religious sections of bookstores are huge. People are in search. People are looking for something of greater depth and of greater meaning for their lives. The truth is that sometimes people are looking in all of the wrong places. They are looking outward instead of inward. An old Hassidic story will illustrate the point.

Isaac's Quest

Once there was a simple merchant named Isaac from the town of Kracow. Isaac had a dream one night that under the Charles Bridge in Prague there was buried treasure. Isaac thought he had received a hint from heaven and if he were to find the treasure he could retire. He said goodbye to his wife and told her that he would be gone for several days. She wondered what the burlap sack and shovel were for, but didn't question him. The journey to Prague was a long one, but at last he made it.

Soon he found the palace and the spot he saw in his dream. He waited until dark and then began to dig. He dug and he dug. He found nothing but more dirt. Still he persisted and, before he realized it, the sun was rising.

Suddenly a voice boomed from above his fairly deep hole, "What are you doing?" Isaac jumped out and saw that it was one of the Emperor's guards. Isaac trembled with fear and told the guard that he had a dream that he should search for buried treasure near the palace. The guard burst into laughter and told Isaac that he had a dream that some peddler from a little town had a treasure buried underneath his house. "How silly," Isaac said. In a lot less time than it took to dig the hole, Isaac had refilled it and was headed back home. Hurriedly he pulled up a couple of floor boards and began to dig under his house. Before long he found an old trunk and in it was incredible wealth. Isaac realized that indeed his true wealth was with him all along. With his new wealth Isaac not only prospered, but was generous to others as well.

Most of us won't find buried gold and jewels beneath our homes, but we can find wonderful treasures within ourselves and we can go even further with them once we know they are there. So just how do we go about this process of discovering ourselves? The answer is simpler than it might appear. We give hints about ourselves all the time. The problem is that often they are scattered about in our lives and not collected in one place where we can readily see them. I suggest a four part approach. These parts can be done simultaneously or separately and in truth are linked to each other. The four pieces are: (1) writing a spiritual autobiography; (2) listing life's accomplishments that generate the greatest pride; (3) writing a narrative that describes a typical day, and (4) writing a summary of a typical week's activities. These pieces needn't be written in any particular order. In fact, they can be written simultaneously or in segments. The person being coached might find that they move back and forth as ideas, memories and thoughts enter their mind.

The Spiritual Autobiography

The spiritual autobiography helps pull together the totality of a client's life. Most of the time we are much more aware of the current week than the greater picture of our lives; however, I typically propose to my client that unless an unusual event happened, even most of last week has already faded from memory. So, just how does one take on this daunting task of a spiritual autobiography? Our lives have outlines. We talk about them all the time. The landmarks of our life fall into certain places. One of the ways to determine our own life's outline is to write a timeline of major events. We start with our birth and move on to school, graduation, career choice, adulthood and so forth. Ultimately we will have an end to our outline when we die.

Writing a Timeline

Let's look at an example or two. We will start with

Deborah Schwartz who we met at the opening of this article. The top of Deborah's paper reads "Deborah Rosa Merbaum Schwartz." The first time Deborah recorded some dates, she reported the following: (1) March 2, 1952 (born to Stanley and Barbara Merbaum), (2) September 1957 (began Kindergarten at Ticonderoga Elementary School), (3) September 1964 (moved on to Woodrow Wilson Junior High), (4) March 1965 (Bat Mitzvah at Temple Israel), (5) May 1968 (confirmation at Temple Israel), (6) June 1970 (graduation from Newburg High School), and so forth.

Deborah remarked, "These are the main milestones of my life." She went on to comment that she still didn't see herself as a particularly spiritual person and that writing a spiritual autobiography still seemed elusive. Yet if we look at the brief outline of her life we see that there are a number of events in her life that are connected with religious rituals: her birth, Bat Mitzvah, Confirmation, wedding and births of her kids. These are institutionalized religious events, but they form an outline that we can use as milestones in our lives.

Filling In the Details

Once my clients have written the timeline of major milestones in their life, we can use these milestones as topics within the writing of a spiritual autobiography. As my clients write about one event they will remember others. I invite them to add these events to their timeline and write about them as well. Let's look at some of what Deborah wrote about regarding her lifetime events:

My Mom told me that I was born during a blizzard.

Dad barely got Mom to the hospital in time. I've always been in a rush. I weighed almost 8 pounds.

Dad said the doctor told him I was "feisty." That hasn't changed either. . . The Saturday after I was born, my father went to the synagogue and he was called to say a prayer when the Rabbi read from the Torah and my name was announced. . . . It was also about the time that I started to think about politics and all of that. Rabbi Eisenberg was pretty cool. He told me to talk about whatever I wanted.

A couple of times he thought I was getting to be what he called "a little radical." We talked about it and I toned it down a bit.

Deborah related her sense of pride in this achievement and a connection to her family history.

Once Deborah had finished the timeline of her life she wrote down a few specific dates associated with important events. She wrote about other lifecycle events such as attending a grandmother's funeral and a cousin's wedding. As she progressed, Deborah added more events and descriptions. She would note them on her timeline and write a narrative paragraph or two. She decided to keep everything in chronological order, but considered other ways to group her narratives.

Before long Deborah began to see—when viewed retrospectively—that there was quite a bit in her life that had happened and it was quite revealing of who she was.

Let's step back from Deborah for a moment. We'll meet another client, Jim O'Brian. Jim has been on a quest similar to Deborah's. Jim is 30, recently engaged to Diana, and doing well in his newly established auto repair and detailing business. Jim has an easy way with people and is gregarious. Since he was young, Jim has enjoyed being around cars. He wanted to be an auto designer. He took an elective on entrepreneurship during high school and was captivated by the idea of owning his own business. He decided to take some advanced training in auto mechanics and business management. He worked for a couple of other shops and observed all he could. Finally, he felt confidence—he could set out on his own. With savings and business plan in hand, Jim obtained financing for his new venture and opened his shop. Within a few months he was making a profit and developing a fine reputation among his customers and peers.

Jim met Diana just after his 29th birthday. Their personal chemistry was magical and they knew there was something special between them. Among other things, Jim and Diana were attracted to each other's work ethic and commitment to the people they served. Diana was active in her church. In fact she met Jim at church. Jim said he attended church out of habit, but didn't spend much time thinking about what he called "church stuff." "I believe in God and doing the right things, but it's not something I dwell on." Active faith involvement was a big part of Diana's life. She knew that there was a deep side to Jim. He just didn't see it.

Jim undertook the same tasks that Deborah had done. He prepared a timeline and began to write narratives about certain events. His grandfather, Patrick O'Brian played an important role in this timeline. During his high school years Jim liked to bring girlfriends to his grandparents' home because they always found Patrick's Irish accent and demeanor to be "cute." Patrick would regale whoever was in the living room with a story or two. Jim often sought out Patrick's advice and found him to have a sympathetic ear for the vicissitudes of adolescence. All this suddenly came to an end the night of his high school graduation. The evening started off well; however, Jim began to have a gnawing feeling in his gut. He noted that his grandfather had been on the quiet side during the day and hadn't said much. About midnight the party at the hotel was winding down and people were heading home. Jim decided to swing by his house. He met his parents in the living room dressed to leave. "Didn't I tell you where I was going to be?" Jim asked. Jim's Dad said solemnly: "Of

course you did. You aren't in trouble, but Grandpa Patrick has been taken to the hospital." Jim, his parents, and sister Colleen drove to the hospital.

The family huddled together as they waited for news. Soon Jim's aunts, uncles and many cousins had come to the hospital. Thirty long minutes later Dr. Epstein walked towards them with a sad face. Dr. Epstein explained all that had been done to try, in vain, to save 80 year old Patrick. Jim wrote extensively about that evening and the days that followed. Jim described how Father Duggan asked if he and his cousin Bonnie would speak at the funeral.

Writing the eulogy was both difficult and helpful for Jim. He attached a copy of the speech to his narrative. Jim's words at the funeral were just what the family needed to hear. Jim also remembered the words of Father Duggan who said that as long as those who loved Patrick continued to live their lives according to the values they learned from him, the spirit of Patrick would live on in their hearts. The last thing Jim did before opening the door of his own business was to put a picture of his Grandfather Patrick on the wall looking down on his desk. Without even thinking about it, he often looked up to that photo. He wanted to conduct business in a manner that Patrick would have approved.

Learning about Ourselves from Our Stories

Deborah and Jim both share something in common. They have a strong underpinning of conviction and faith that guides their life — yet they may neither be aware of it, nor be able to articulate it. In Jim's case it is fairly clear. His wife, Diana, saw it immediately. Although she had heard of him first through his reputation as an auto shop owner, she became intrigued when she noticed him at church. Diana introduced herself and mentioned that she had heard about his shop. They spoke for a few minutes and she sensed he liked her. She asked if he was free for lunch. He said he was due at his parents' home for Sunday supper, but he had time to grab a cup of coffee on the way. The cup of coffee grew into an invitation to join the family and the rest is history! Diana knew that Jim was a person of principle. Having seen him in church showed him to be a person of faith as well.

Jim didn't like the idea of being labeled as "religious." To him that had connotations of Bible thumping TV evangelists who were more interested in empire building than serving God. He was just a guy who was firm in his values. He insisted that although he enjoyed Church, he didn't have a sense of fire and brimstone in his head that guided his actions; rather, it was what he learned from his grandfather Patrick, parents, and other people he respected. Diana encouraged him to see his faith according to his definition and not someone else's.

Jim mumbled in agreement with Diana, but wasn't entirely convinced.

Deborah had similar experiences. One of the events that Deborah described was the circumcision or "bris" of her son Aaron. Deborah wrote:

As the Rabbi explained the meanings of the names we chose, I noticed that I was connecting to something different. It wasn't just a ritualized means of achieving better health; it was the joining of generations together. I had heard that many times before, but I had never felt it, not even with Danny and Aliza. Perhaps it was because I wasn't stressing over the ritual and I was focusing on the meaning. When the Rabbi described the meaning of the names we had chosen it clicked for me. We chose Aaron in memory of Michael's grandfather, Aaron Rohatyn. He died just after I knew I was pregnant. He knew I was pregnant before he died, so I always felt there was a connection between the two. Aaron was an immigrant like most of my friends' grandparents. He was a bookbinder by trade and always infused a love of reading and learning. I never mentioned this to Michael, but he was my favorite member of his family. The other name we gave Aaron was Merbaum. Since Aaron is our last child and the feminist side of me wanted to pass on my family's name, we decided to go with Merbaum. The moment the Rabbi described those names I felt a great sense of pride. Michael and I were becoming a part of history and the continuity of our families.

For both Deborah and Jim the memory of these experiences and thinking of them in light of subsequent events in their lives caused them to realize that there were indeed parts of each of them that connected to something beyond themselves. In both cases they felt connected to their families over time as well as in the present. While they each didn't feel 100% comfortable calling these stories "religious experiences," they did consider it to be something more than an ordinary event. They allowed for the possibility of seeing the term "spiritual" to be something that could be applied to various aspects of their lives. A seed had been planted in their minds and it was beginning to take root.

Listing Life Accomplishments

The compiling of a spiritual autobiography as described will have a number of benefits. It will help clients organize their thoughts. It will give an overview of who they are and provide the tools to unlock details that are hidden even to themselves. In general, each of us believes that we know a lot about ourselves; however, there are aspects of ourselves that we don't really know. Let's look at an example of a personality trait that is obvious to others, but not so clear to an individual.

When Diana met Jim she was impressed by the attention he gave to his family, particularly to the kids and older members of the family. He was one of the younger cousins in his generation. Some of his older cousins had young children of their own. Jim always took time to play games with them, read a story, or take something down off a shelf. When it came to the elderly he would frequently volunteer to help with a shopping trip or drive to a doctor's appointment even during the work day. He felt it was his responsibility as a member of the family. Diana knew that Jim had a strong sense of values with regard to family. She wasn't alone. Although he never realized it, some of his employees followed his example and became more attentive to their own families as well.

As Jim began to write his life story, he saw aspects of his core being that he had taken for granted. Jim was a bit reluctant as he began to write. His first made a list and then added a paragraph or two of narrative. Jim's first entry read like this:

Playing Little League. I played my first season of Little League when I was 9. I was smaller than the other boys and struggled to keep up with them. I couldn't throw as far, my fielding sucked and my hitting was...even worse than my fielding. I had been so excited to be on the team, but after a couple of practices I started to hate it. I felt as though all my dreams of being a baseball player were foolish. I wanted to quit. I had a truckload of reasons. My folks insisted that I stick it through. I felt bad. My grandparents would come to the game and see me on the bench. Finally I got into a game and when I got to bat I struck out. I felt even worse, but despite that I decided to try hard until at least the end of the season. I eventually did get some hits and I began to feel better about my playing, but I was still sure that the season would be my last.

Then a big surprise happened. At the end of the season our coach, Mr. Roberts, had a barbeque for the team. After we had eaten he gathered everybody around and began to pass out trophies. At the end Mr. Roberts said, 'I have saved my favorite for last. This is the award for the player that really knows what the game is all about and tries the hardest. It's the award for "Most Improved Player."' When Mr. Roberts called out my name I was stunned. That trophy still sits on my desk. Whenever something seems to be more than I can handle I look at the trophy and keep on going. It's hard to believe that a trophy from when I was 9 would mean so much.

Jim described other events, proposing to Diana, and the day his business plan was accepted by the bank for a loan. The loan officer said that he was quite impressed by the thorough and knowledgeable way Jim had

presented himself and his plan. The officer also gave him the names of some other business people who could offer good advice. He called those recommended by the loan officer. When he called, they knew who he was and welcomed him into the business community. He was proud that as a young man he had already earned respect.

Deborah applied herself to the same task. She first wrote about her children:

My proudest accomplishment is raising, with my husband Michael, three kids who are terrific human beings... even as teenagers. I've got so many stories. A recent one is about Aliza who can be a challenge. This story is about drug use. Michael and I have been close to another family, the Rosenthals. They have kids around the age of ours and their daughter Julie is about Aliza's age. The Rosenthal kids were always top students, well behaved and seemed to be perfect kids. At times, when Aliza's grades were not where we thought they should be, we would suggest that she study with Julie since they were friends anyway. Aliza always seemed to have a reason not to study with Julie. Some time later Dave Rosenthal called Michael. He needed the name of a good drug rehab center. We were stunned to be sure.

Michael and I sat down to talk to Aliza. She was somber when we came into her room. She knew what had happened. Aliza began to tell us that she was aware of Julie's problems. She had spent many hours with Julie talking about issues in her life and encouraging her to get help. This was all going on while we were holding up Julie as an exemplar of a good student. We felt terrible. Aliza said she was frustrated with us, but didn't want to betray the confidence she held with Julie. It was Julie who had finally revealed her problems to her parents at Aliza's urging. Aliza told us that we had taught her to always keep her word and to always care about the needs of others. She said that it would have been far easier to impugn Julie by telling us of her substance abuse and other problems, but she felt that it was far better to keep her word and urge her friend to get help. She also said that if she felt Julie was in danger, she would have sought the advice of an adult.

I can not tell you how proud I was of Aliza. She handled so many different and difficult ethical decisions at the same time. In each instance she did the right thing. I began to realize that while we might argue about day to day issues, we were in the same place on the big and important issues. While I give Aliza all the credit for what she did and how she conducted herself, I believe she was

able to make the right decisions because we had provided her with the tools to do it.

Analyzing Our Accomplishments

At this point, clients can begin to clearly see that there are distinct elements and forces that guide them in life. These forces are deep within us and manifest themselves consistently over time. They are certainly so in the case of Deborah and Jim. For Jim these forces revolve around his business and upcoming marriage. For Deborah they concern the lives of her children. There are a number of possible ways to generate a narrative list of personal accomplishments. One way is to review what has been written in the autobiography, select events from there and add additional ones as they come to mind.

A second way is to make a list of activities and situations that are deemed to be important. For example, Jim prepared the following list: "School, Church, Home, Sports, Diana, Model Building, Music and Comedy." Under each category he wrote down a series of events and then wrote a narrative about each. Sometimes, this exercise can yield some pleasant surprises. If asked, Jim would never consider himself to be a comedian. However, as he began to list his accomplishments he noticed that on numerous occasions he would be called upon to speak and use a humorous story or specifically tell a joke. He often used humor as a way to ease tensions. My clients are all like Jim with talents and skills that they don't even recognize.

Deborah also made a list of accomplishments. She too listed academics, professional, family, community and other areas of ability. Deborah was not unaware that she had talents that others often noticed before she did. One of her favorite stories is about public speaking. Deborah wrote:

Back in college I took a number of classes where we frequently had to present and discuss assignments either as a group or as individuals. It never bothered me to do this. In fact I enjoyed it. One time in a business class we had to present a case study. It involved doing research and putting together a presentation. A friend, Hank, gave his presentation before me. He had prepared very well and knew his stuff. The professor asked him questions and he answered them perfectly. Next it was my turn and all went well. As we were getting ready to leave class I went over to Hank and told him I thought he had done a great job. Hank seemed relieved to just get it over. I was surprised and reminded Hank that it was he who had prepared the material and he was truly the one who knew it best. Hank shrugged his shoulders, smiled and agreed.

After that, Hank said that I looked so at ease when I spoke. He said I just stood up and talked. I responded that what else would I have done, I opened my mouth and words came out. At that moment we both had a realization. I realized that I had a gift for public speaking. I understood at that moment that some people really had to make an effort to make it work. . . . I have joined Toastmasters and frequently am asked to make presentations in all sorts of situations.

Both Jim and Deborah enjoyed this exercise. They allowed themselves to do some bragging about themselves, even if it was mostly to themselves. As they began to add to their lists and develop categories of achievements, they began to see patterns of behavior and more importantly some of the underlying thoughts and drives that guided them from within.

A Day/Week in the Life of ...

The process that I have described is still one of looking from above – an overview. We can also learn much from the routine parts of our life. I suggest to my clients that they describe a typical day and then describe a typical week. As with the spiritual autobiography, it is helpful for a coaching client to produce a timeline. In this case, instead of putting years on a timeline one puts the hours of the day.

Deborah's Days

Deborah jumped right into the exercise. She opened up her planner and thought she would be done in five minutes. She thought of her life as quite organized, but she discovered that there was more to it than she realized. She began with Monday as she tended to think of her life as the work week and then the weekend. Monday began with a rushed breakfast. Now that Aliza was old enough to drive, Deborah and Aaron would sometimes drive to school together, though most of the time they walked or rode their bikes. They were both in sports and didn't mind the bonus workout. When Aaron turned 16, Deborah and Michael bought him and Aliza an older used car. Since Mondays were slow to start the kids often took the car.

At work Mondays always had a 10:00 am staff meeting. Deborah described how she trained her staff through shifting the chairing responsibilities at the Monday staff meeting. Teamwork and mutual support were a high priority. Deborah also believed that the absence of someone (due to vacation, illness or leaving the office) shouldn't impede the functioning of the organization. She made a point of letting the meeting chair develop an individual style and she encouraged creativity. The Monday staff meetings became a highlight. Following the meeting, Deborah was on the phone with clients

who had left messages. Lunch was spent reading or going to the library.

During the afternoon, Deborah usually met with the product design engineers. While she was quite adept at market study techniques, demographic analysis and marketing, she relied on others to do the creative work of product development and design. It had taken her awhile, but she had finally got the 'business staff' and the 'design staff' to work together. Even though the senior engineer was at the Monday morning meeting, she still wanted individual staff members to talk to each other...and now they were doing that. The Monday afternoon meetings were focused on technical details that most of the business staff couldn't follow. Deborah could follow the details to a degree, but mostly relied on the expertise of the engineers. During the remainder of the afternoon she more thoroughly read staff reports and responded to them. She saw herself more as a coordinator than just a boss. By 4:30 or 5:00 pm she was leaving the office.

If the day was all business, the evening was family. Deborah arrived home to find that Aaron had set the table and was on the computer. Aliza was on the phone. Deborah sat in the living room and read the paper for a while. She called the kids to the kitchen and they started to prepare dinner. Aliza made a salad and Aaron started the vegetables while Deborah put some chicken in a casserole dish. By 6:30 Michael had arrived and they all sat down for dinner. Michael asked the kids about the school day and what they expected from the week in terms of school work and other events. Aliza had a track meet on Wednesday and Aaron had a baseball game on Thursday. Deborah made a mental note. She would attend as many games and concerts as she could. Michael did so as well. After dinner the kids did the dishes and cleaned up the kitchen before heading off to do homework.

While Deborah and Michael had a good relationship with the kids, they weren't immune from the various conflicts of adolescence. Deborah and Aliza had argued over phone use in the past and now engage in another minor skirmish. Overall she found the evening to be restful for all were at home. The rest of the work week was filled with a blur of work projects, sports events, homework and an occasional squabble over Aliza's excessive time on the phone.

Work began to wind down by Friday afternoon. There was an unspoken rule that if the phones were quiet and work was up to date it was permissible to leave early. Frequently, the manufacturing employees would take a shorter lunch and also close down an hour or so early. Deborah at times would randomly give them all of Friday afternoon off as a thank you for getting rushed

or complicated orders filled on time. This was a big morale booster.

Friday night was the start of the Sabbath. The table was set with white linens and napkins along with the 'good' silverware and occasionally the China as well. The family would recite the traditional prayers together. The Sabbath candles, wine, bread and songs add even greater richness to this family event.. Members of Deborah's family looked forward to the meal as it was a guaranteed "no gripe and no nag" time. It was a time to relax and discuss the positive aspects of the week. Though Aliza and Deborah were still at odds over phone use, the topic was never raised. As the kids got older there was increased discussion about social activities on Friday night. Deborah and Michael always made that a family night with the exception of going to the synagogue. A compromise was reached that dinner was to be at home and that pre-approved socializing was acceptable, unless they were going to services. This arrangement worked fairly well.

Michael decided to attend services and Deborah stayed home on Saturday morning. The day was quiet. In the evening they joined friends for dinner. Michael and Deborah weren't strict Sabbath observers, but avoided business work, shopping and heavier household chores. Sunday morning everyone went to the synagogue. Aliza was a teacher's assistant, Aaron was in Confirmation class, Deborah was meeting with her committee for a wrap up meeting and Michael was taking a class. In the afternoon it was time for grocery shopping and errand running. The kids either scattered or did homework. Before long it was time to think about the week ahead....

Jim's Week

Jim typically met with the whole staff on Monday morning to review scheduled clients. They always got first priority, but (as with any auto related business) much of it was spur of the moment or based on a sudden need of a customer. Jim wanted to review any known difficult situations and he reviewed any scheduled activities, including new product demonstrations or training on new equipment. He also scheduled regular meetings to go over any regulatory or legal changes.

The week Jim wrote about had two such events. On Tuesday afternoon a new piece of equipment arrived and everyone was scheduled to rotate through training. It was similar to existing equipment, but easier to use and a bit more sophisticated. Jim was frustrated that he couldn't afford to replace everything at once, but he preferred "pay as you go" instead of borrowing to buy the equipment. This approach worked well for him. His grandfather had always told him about the Depression,

so he had a bit of an aversion to taking on debt.

Jim was finding that he was spending less time doing shop work and more time speaking to fleet customers and vendors. He enjoyed the hands-on work and felt that his presence in the shop kept his skills sharp and provided him with the opportunity to train his staff. He also knew that his customers liked to see him working on their car. At noon Jim ate at his desk unless he was at Rotary. When Diana had the day off, they would go out for lunch and a walk. Jim's days were similar to hers in that each one was slightly unpredictable. Other than scheduled appointments, he never knew whose car would drive up. He enjoyed the variety. It was the combination of interacting with customers and the challenge to be technically proficient that he enjoyed the most.

Jim did his best to keep set hours. He believed that not only he, but also all of his employees, should "have a life." While the shop had scheduled evening and some weekend hours, he did his best to keep his evenings free when Diana was off work. Jim believed in a balance between work and other aspects of his life. His grandfather used to tell him that life was like an old wagon. If the load wasn't distributed well the wagon would tip over. He told Jim that our lives were wagons that we fill with things like work, fun, family, and sleep. There were days when Jim felt like his wagon would tip, but somehow he would always find the best balance.

Gaining Deeper Insights

At this point we have gotten to know quite a bit about Deborah and Jim. They are both successful people. They are at different places in their lives, but in many ways they are quite similar. When we view their lives from the perspective of a few days or many years we can see quite a few trends emerge about each of them. The same analysis that we apply to the lives of Deborah and Jim we can apply to ourselves and our coaching clients. Needless to say, we can identify much more about ourselves and our coaching clients than we can glean from the brief sketches of Deborah and Jim's life that I have presented in this article. However, before leaving Deborah and Jim, lets have a look.

It is not surprising that our initial peek at Deborah's office and Jim's shop revealed quite a bit about them. We saw indications of personal history, family, community activities and work. Our deeper look revealed how surface indicators of these personalities manifest themselves on a continual basis. It also revealed how both Deborah and Jim weren't even aware at times of all that drove them from within. The hardest challenge of a personal spiritual journey is discovering those pieces that haven't been noticed before. These are the core attributes that drive people to be who they are.

They are the forces that motivate. We can help our clients use these forces to their advantage. Sometimes our clients may want to amplify them. In some cases they might even want to tone them down. Our clients' biggest challenges are often to harness these forces in a beneficial manner.

Let's look at an example. Jim discovered that he had an ability to entertain people and make them laugh. On the one hand, he was already using that talent at his Rotary Club and at family gatherings. He pondered how he could apply this skill at his shop. Jim stood back from the counter and watched his staff speak to customers as they came into the shop. His staff was polite and helpful, but some of the customers were apprehensive. Some had been in accidents and others had come into his shop after having had less than pleasing results at other shops.

Jim tried greeting these customers and using some humor. He carefully gauged their response as if he was working with a crowd at a show. Often times the humor was followed by reassurances that helped ease his customers' apprehension. He would reiterate his promise of satisfaction and at every step inform them of their options and costs. While this wasn't a major change in his basic philosophy, it was the introduction of another facet of his core personality into a different realm of his life. He found that as people had a greater sense of ease and trust in him they were more relaxed. This was especially important to customers who were in accidents where the issues were far more serious than replacing a part or an ordinary detailing job. The level of customer satisfaction went even higher and his referrals increased. Jim was successful in drawing from within himself to find talents and skills. It was the combination of technical ability, high expectations and standards, and an understanding of people's needs that allowed Jim to rise above the average.

Concluding Comments

No human can define for any other person the nature of "spirit." It truly is different for everyone. For all of us it comes from within. No one is without spirit. Beyond that which we find in ourselves, many people find themselves searching for a connection to a force outside of themselves. Frequently this search leads to the adoption of a religious faith. Many continue in the faith traditions of their families, others engage in a search and still others find little other than social enjoyment from organized faith. Religious faith can be a powerful and positive force. In the case of both Deborah and Jim, religion played a multifaceted role in their lives. Yet many people retreat from religious practice as adults — other than assuming a minimal level of affiliation while raising children. Religious faith is like any other aspect of our lives in that we must continue to grow. The

answers that satisfy a 10 year old will not work for a 30 year old.. Unfortunately, many people haven't allowed themselves the possibility of adult level growth in the area of religious faith.

I encourage my coaching clients to view religion as they would view career, politics, sports or any other arena of their life. No one can dictate how and what one should believe. I invite my clients to explore different religious concepts within the faith tradition of their birth. They may find that there are many possibilities for an adult participant they had not encountered before, or my clients may find that they have moved within themselves to an altogether different understanding. The bottom line is that I urge my clients not to be bound by thoughts that others will judge them. Other people may disagree with us on many topics so there is no reason we should not allow ourselves religious liberty as well. Getting to know, understand, and develop that which is within us is a lifelong journey. It is an exploration without end and with endless possibilities. I wish you success and joy on your own journey — as I do with the men and women I have the privilege to coach.

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