

C H A P T E R

1

THE ADVENTURE OF YOUR LIFE

Wanted: People to undertake hazardous journey—small wages, bitter cold, long months of complete darkness; constant danger; safe return doubtful; honor and recognition in case

of success. This ad was placed by the explorer Sir Ernest Shackleton, who was looking for people to accompany him on his expedition to the South Pole. He was describing as honestly as he could an adventure, an endeavor in which the outcome was un-

Security is mostly a superstition. It does not exist in nature. Avoiding danger is no safer in the long run than outright exposure. Life is either a daring adventure or nothing.

—Helen Keller

certain, where great reward was possible but only at the cost of risk, hard work, and danger.

Whether he knew it or not, Shackleton's words were also an apt description of most people's lives.

Our lives are adventures. At work, at home, and in our communities, we undertake often-difficult endeavors in which the outcomes are unknown, where success and fulfillment are possible—not guaranteed—but only at the cost of working hard, taking risks, and sometimes even facing danger.

On any adventure we have a choice. We can try to simply survive it—clinging to the hope we will get to the end unscathed—or we can try to thrive, allowing the adventure to grow us in ways we could not have imagined when we began. Clearly, the objective of the adventure of our lives is not simply to survive (“Whew, I got to my death safely!!”) but to thrive in it and grow.

Here is what we mean.

THRIVING

In the late seventies at Wilson Learning Corporation, we developed “Wellness,” a program directed at helping individuals develop their physical, emotional, mental and spiritual selves. The intended out-

come of “Wellness” was helping people become not only more successful but also more fulfilled. (Success and fulfillment are linked as a theme throughout this book. The self-actualized people Abraham Maslow wrote about were in the hunt for both.)

We looked at the question of wellness this way: When we get sick, we go to doctors. A good physician takes us—we would hope—from being sick to being “not sick.” We often live our lives thinking that because we are not sick—not in pain or dysfunctional—we are well. But, in truth, we are more often simply “not sick.”

sick-----*not sick*-----*thriving*

This distinction is easy to see with physical health. We have the flu, we go to the doctor, we are told to rest and drink lots of fluids, and eventually we get over the flu. We are no longer sick—but often we are nowhere near our optimum state of physical health. We aren’t sick, but we still could be overweight, not getting enough sleep, not even remotely in shape . . . we aren’t physically thriving.

Surviving versus thriving

There are lots of people who are simply not sick during the adventure of their lives: They are not happy at work; they are in the middle of their lives but have lost their sense of direction and purpose. Others aren’t consistently feeling the way they want to feel. Some find themselves facing great opportunity—an adventure—but they find themselves unwilling to take the risk.

Many of us are just surviving our lives, thinking that we are doing what we’re supposed to do. We think we’re okay—but we’re not truly thriving in our one and only great adventure.

What we want to explore in this book is how to thrive in the great adventure of our lives. We are also going to suggest that what is crucial to the endeavor is emotional, mental and spiritual growth.

GROWING UP EMOTIONALLY

Here is the paradox. Learning how to thrive requires much thought and reflection, yet the answers are not to be found only through intelligence. To use the poet's dichotomy, thriving involves not solely matters of the head, but also matters of the heart. The question of whether we'll thrive in our adventure or settle for less is directed primarily at our emotional intelligence. The people best able to thrive in the adventure of their lives are those who are emotionally mature.

EMOTIONAL MATURITY:

We define emotional maturity as having access to and control over the emotional energies required to respond optimally to life's events.

New York Times science writer

Daniel Goleman summarizes emotional maturity in his best-selling *Emotional Intelligence* this way:

1. Being self-aware—*knowing our emotions, recognizing a feeling as it happens;*
2. Managing emotions—*handling and managing our feelings appropriately;*
3. Motivating ourselves—*marshaling emotions to pay attention, delay gratification, and stifle impulsiveness;*
4. Feeling empathy—*understanding others and recognizing their emotions;* and
5. Handling relationships—*building and maintaining relationships.*

When we are emotionally mature, we are much better able to solve the two categories of problems that cause much pain,

dysfunction, and frustration (both personal and organizational). Intrapersonal problems (within ourselves) show up as lack of confidence, self-doubt, lack of clarity, anxiety, and fear. Interpersonal problems (between ourselves and others) result in conflict, lack of trust, ineffective communication, and, again, lack of clarity.

GROWING UP SPIRITUALLY

The handmaiden of emotional growth is spiritual growth. Let's go back to the idea of the adventure. An adventure is an endeavor in which the outcome is uncertain and contingent on many factors, some within our control but many not. And yet, our adventure is framed by this certainty: It is temporary. Our adventure is completed by our death. It is the great and looming presence of death that gives poignancy and urgency to our lives.

I was sixty-three years old and at the very top of my game. I was making a lot of money, well known in my field. I went for my annual checkup and the doctor said, in that analytical, medical way, "We need to do more tests, but we think you have bladder cancer." More tests, diagnosis confirmed.

Nothing we can do, no position we hold can protect us from the capriciousness of life. Now you're here, now you're not. I caught my cancer early enough to stop it from metastasizing for now. But the lesson is indelible. There was a time when we did not exist. After we die, there will be a time when we don't exist. In between is a brief second in time in which we exist. These truths apply to each of us.

Why am I here?

Given the "now you see me, now you don't" nature of our lives, the important questions become the spiritual ones—Who am I? Why am I here? What difference will I make? The spiritual adventure is to find and live the answers to those questions.

That death frames all this is not morbid to the emotionally and spiritually mature. It is simply the truth. It might be painful, we might choose to deny it for much of our lives, but “growing up” requires that we eventually embrace this truth. Our deaths can illuminate our path; they can create clarity. We can use the fact of our eventual death to inspire us to get on with it.

SPIRITUAL MATURITY:

- ▼ **Answering and living the answers to the questions Why am I here? and What is my life about?**
- ▼ **Me to we**

The large picture is not about “me”

Spiritual growth also requires moving from the position that “life is about me” to seeing ourselves as part of a whole, one thread in the tapestry. Fritz Kunkel, a German-born psychotherapist, calls this shift “me to we.”

With this shift in perspective come many gifts. When we are involved with others, we are less fearful. When we serve others, we get feelings of fulfillment and joy that are difficult to dig out of the flinty ground of “life is about me.”

LEARNING WHAT WE ALREADY KNOW

Growing up is an important theme of *Play to Win!* and the key to thriving in the adventure of our lives. When Plato wrote that learning is rediscovering what we already know, he probably wasn’t talking about quantum physics. More likely, he was talking about the themes and ideas presented here. It seems common sense—we know that emotional maturity and spiritual growth are vital to any hope we have of becoming truly fulfilled and successful.

Yet it can’t be said that this is common practice. It takes discipline and work to understand and control our emotions, to grow up

emotionally. It takes courage to fully absorb the truth that we will die and then to use that truth to propel us toward our reason for being here. It often takes a wake-up call of crisis proportions to see that we are not the center of the universe, but rather, that we are here to help and serve others. Unfortunately, we often don't come to that understanding until it is nearly too late, until we are looking back on our lives wondering "What if . . . ?"

IF YOU COULD DO IT ALL OVER AGAIN . . .

Our friend and colleague Dick Leider's primary mission in life is helping people plan and live careers that are successful and meaningful. For his remarkable book *The Power of Purpose*, Dick interviewed hundreds of people in their seventies and eighties. (He initially interviewed two hundred couples in the late 1970s and has followed up with approximately thirty interviews every year thereafter.) He asked these simple questions: If you could live your life over again, what would you change? What is the wisdom that you would pass on? Although he got many different and specific responses, most fell into three categories.

I would see the big picture

Dick's subjects often said they were so busy living day to day that they missed truly living their lives—all of a sudden they were sixty-five. The only time they reflected on who they were and why they were here was in times of crisis. They wished they hadn't relied on crisis to inform their decision making and their life's direction. They wished they had taken more time to reflect on the big picture, including the spiritual aspect of their lives.

I would be more courageous

The second pattern Dick heard was the wish to have been more courageous, to have taken more risks, especially at work and in rela-

tionships. At work his subjects would have risked being more creative and finding work that was meaningful to them. In relationships, they would have focused on having the courage to be better friends, parents, sons, or daughters.

I would make a difference

They also wished they had understood earlier that the essence of living is to make a positive difference. No matter how successful or unsuccessful people were, they expressed a hunger to leave a legacy. Reflecting back, they wished they could have made more of a difference.

YOUR CHOICE

See the bigger picture, live more courageously, and make a difference. The point is to ask yourself right now, in the present, Do these themes pique my interest, touch my heart, stir my soul? Is that what I want my work and life—my great adventure—to be about? Or will I wait, change nothing, “survive” the adventure of my life, and look back and ask myself “What if . . . ?”

The choice, of course, is yours.

The map

If you choose to thrive, this book is a guide. It will make choosing to thrive in your adventure easier. Part II: Rethinking the Game is about redefining winning and success. Part III: Thinking Differently about Thinking covers different ways to understand how we think and how our thinking influences how we feel and how we act. In Part IV: Solving Problems and Creating Results, we will introduce the thinking tools that you can use every day to help control how you respond to the events that occur on any adventure. In Part V: Work and Life Strategies, we will examine what thriving in life and work really can mean. In Part VI: The Spiritual Adventure, we

will look at the elements of growing up spiritually. Finally, in Part VII: Choosing Growth, we'll walk you through a simple plan for helping you thrive in *your* adventure.

The journey

But *Play to Win!* is just a book. You cannot thrive in your life just by reading a book, no more than you can satisfy your appetite by reading a cookbook. Life is an adventure to be fully experienced, lived, experimented with, and committed to. A book is a poor substitute for experiencing what the adventure has to offer. But a good guide-book can help—it can provide tools to make the adventure easier and the insights of others to help illuminate your experience.

This book is such a guide. It is full of tools and perspectives that we—and many of our clients—have found useful in our adventures. The first perspectives that we want to discuss—and challenge—are the beliefs we hold with almost religious fervor about winning and losing, success and failure.