

PAMPHLET 56

THE RETURN

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We shall not cease from exploration
And the end of all our exploring
Will be to arrive where we started
And know the place for the first time.

T.S. Eliot

Since 1990 my explorations have taken me to the heights and depths of my career as a leader of change in the corporate world, to exhilarating learning and a Ph.D. at age 50, to creative new work, to a sorrowful and liberating divorce after 35 years of marriage, to the strength and inspiration of the spiritual mountains of southwest Colorado, and now to the free and wide open plains of North Dakota.

I never imagined I would make such changes in my life. My emotional life has been active, to say the least, with plenty of necessary time in the “pits” as well as many peak experiences. Each change, initiated by inner stirrings that emerged from earlier times in my life, brought forth new awareness that created new yearnings. My odyssey circles, spirals, pauses, adapts, advances, regresses, and changes in the details while the whole moves, I hope, toward my greater maturity as a human being. I learn slowly to live my life in a more natural, balanced, conscious, and responsible way.

In my last corporate position I experienced the best and worst of organizations as I led successful change and discovered leadership talents I did not know I had. My heart was opened to the vast untapped human potential in our organizations and in each of us—untapped because of how we think, how we lead, and because we settle for mediocrity. I confronted injustice in the organization, truths were denied, and I refused pressures to conform. I discovered strength and courage I did not know I had. I saw the vast need in our leaders for renewed character and commitment to service—character and service lost to the greed of villains, the collusion of many, and the sloth of those who refuse to do the hard work maturity demands. These challenges prepared me to embark on a quest for even deeper insight and learning in my life.

My graduate work was a grand experience in my life. I studied the deepest theories of life's dynamics and began to formulate my own ideas for how to translate these theories to my life, to the lives of clients, and to life in organizations. Much new knowledge is ignored by leaders. I wonder why so few take the time to learn new insights that would improve performance.

As a consultant I see the deep fear of change, the addictive pace of mindless busy work, and inauthentic employees and leaders alike who conform and see only danger as they cling to the status quo--no matter how much it numbs minds and depresses spirits. The healing and evolution of the human spirit is our challenge, and it cuts across all industries and institutions.

I also see courageous women and men who seize the moment and step bravely into uncertainty with trust and faith in the processes of life. Many of them get wounded profoundly as they make anonymous and unheralded sacrifices for small advancements of humanity. The pain of their losses provides them the choice to grow in new ways or to die within. Most choose continued growth for they understand that they can live many adventures in their lifetimes. Future generations will recognize and benefit from the courage, integrity, and contributions of these heroes and heroines.

I grow impatient with the victims, the helpless, the colluders, the conformists, the irresponsible, and the pseudoinnocents (see Pamphlet 50). Too many excuses are made for them. I wish they would wake up and grow up. I feel contempt for the phony villains of our organizations and institutions. I wish they would leave. I admire the heroes and heroines, and they inspire me to be better. It is time for them to lead.

My priorities were clarified and my focus sharpened by divorce and the deaths of my mother and, a short time later a close friend. I confronted my own mortality at the deepest level yet and now see death as another fear and excitement filled transition with loss, confusion, and new beginnings—just like, but bigger, than other adventures. The awareness of death is an invisible attractor that draws me to what is important in my life. Many speak of the legacy they will leave behind when they die. I am more interested in the learning I will take with me when I go through death's door. If I concentrate on learning life's lessons, my legacy will take care of itself.

I spent 14 months in the San Juan Mountains and experienced daily nature's beauty and power. I have no doubts that nature will survive people. The real question: Will humanity overcome and sustain itself? In

the mountains I learned to be alone with myself, on the edge of the systems I cannot escape completely. I struggled with some of my demons—faith, money, loneliness, impatience, and the anxiety that accompanies freedom of choice. I realized how much I still want to be in control of life. I learned to take care of myself in new ways and continued a ten year quest to reduce my attachment to external validation and things material. Humbled under the vast star-filled sky above the powerful San Juans, I gained a fresh perspective on the challenges that face you and me.

I find life on the “road less traveled” to be hard work after I spent 30 years conforming to conscious and unconscious cultural expectations. I try to be honest with myself even as I know how deceptive I can be with myself. I am committed to authenticity and courage even as I know I can never be completely authentic and am scared often. I suffer frequently the humiliations of the novice as I learn to live in new ways. I criticize and doubt myself at times. And it is easy to find others who never risk themselves but are eager to criticize those who do.

I wonder if I am truly doing God’s will for me or if this spiritual journey mythology is some grand illusion. My spirit suffers frustration as it wants to let go and wants to control, wants to live with uncertainty and wants answers, and wants to be wise when it feels stupid. Sometimes I feel lonely. Solitude, at times, gives me the willies as I come face to face with myself. I fear my own possibilities, so often punished in the workplace and the family. I feel guilty for the pain I cause others. Sometimes I get angry with God and ask for life to be easier.

Real change is difficult. I am not entitled to feel good all the time. The doubts and difficulties challenge my substance and make the journey worthwhile. I continue on because something within says that I must. We were created to move toward our potentials—in all areas of life. Anything less is to settle for mediocrity. I see no alternative if I want to feel alive, and if I want to make my small contribution to the massive change needed to sustain humankind—a contribution life asks each of us to make.

I’ve learned a lot about myself in the past dozen years. I’ve learned much about what I like and what I don’t like for my life, my work, and my relationships. I incorporate, never without a fight, what I see as ugly in me into the broader fabric of my self and my life. I slowly strip away the facades created to gain acceptance and protect against vulnerability. False and conforming images and external symbols of my success do not protect me; they isolate me, and they fool no one—other than me. I’ve learned who my friends are, and I grow my community of imperfect and real people who want authentic and love-filled lives.

Today, as I settle into my new home and community, I feel as if I just returned home from a long and challenging time in the wilderness: A time of loss; a time of fear; a time of chosen submission, a time of questioning; a time of free, difficult, and exciting choices; a time of mistakes and disappointments; a time of delights small and large, and a time of difficult lessons. The nature of my explorations will now change. I want to integrate what I've learned into a simple life, and I want to reflect on and learn more from a lifetime of exciting and challenging experiences.

I am not alone in my quest to rediscover my self and to compose a more meaningful life. The times ask more people to take this journey than ever before, and those already well along the road need to be more courageous than ever before. Our journeys require rebellion against deeply held beliefs about life and leadership that threaten humanity. Such rebellion requires daily courage that challenges us to our core.

As difficult as it is to stand up to injustice and to face our own shadow sides, those of us who take the journey to evolve our humanity refuse to be kept in our places. Often frightened, we do what many others want to do but don't dare. We who hate conflict disturb the peace—in the family, in the workplace, and in the community. We challenge and break with established customs and traditions not sure if we are right. We seek, restlessly and perpetually, to bring about an inner change in the worldview, in the beliefs, and in the actions of those we care about—beginning with ourselves—because we know that the world needs new solutions to problems large and small. We have false starts, go down dead ends, and suffer setbacks as we expand the horizon of our visions and explore the future for others. We fight for a vision of life we believe essential for a sustainable world, and we fight to restore the humanity lost in our world.

We do not want power; we do not want to replace the villains with ourselves as revolutionaries do only to be overthrown by the next revolutionary. We want to change the system so that the selfish and self-serving villains don't feel the need to harm others. As I wrote above, real change is difficult.

Last October (2001) a woman hit a homeless man as he walked along a Fort Worth, Texas highway. She then drove home and parked the car in her garage with the man's body on the hood of her car--his head lodged in the broken windshield. The woman ignored his cries for help, and, over two days, he bled to death--his head still impaled on the windshield. Medical treatment would have saved his life. Her friends then discarded the man's body in a park. The woman's attorney went on national television and minimized her responsibility for her actions. What if he had said, "This woman's soul is dead. We must change the things in our world

that destroy souls even as we hold her accountable for her actions.” But how could he say that? His soul also wants.

Joseph Campbell, author and teacher, wrote that the hero-deed is:

...not today what it was in the century of Galileo. Where then there was darkness, now there is light; but also, where light was, there now is darkness. The modern hero-deed must be that of questing to bring to light again the lost Atlantis of the co-ordinated soul.

The story of the homeless man’s cold and lonely death is but one of the horrible examples that surround us and call us to awareness of the pain around and within us. The call is for personal explorations that will bring each of us back to ourselves with new awareness and a co-ordinated soul. All can take the hero’s difficult journey and find their own way home. We need to because, simply, the world needs better people from which better organizations and institutions will co-evolve.