



The Three Most Important Things In Your Life

I attended my 45th high school reunion last weekend. It was a happy and meaningful two night event. The second night I asked some of my classmates this question: “What are the three things that have happened or you’ve accomplished that have added the most value or happiness to your life?” Here are some very relevant lessons I learned as they reflected on over 40 years of adulthood. (Reading time 180 seconds).

Relationships

The most consistent response, although not universal, was the great contribution that personal relationships brought to most individuals’ lives. For a high percentage of those who had experienced an enduring positive marriage their relationship with their partner made the top three. Taking the number one spot even more often was, as one classmate put it, “The privilege of having and raising children”. These individuals found joy in being part of and observing their children’s and in some cases grandchildren’s lives. For others it was personal friendships: “Knowing I have a friend, who, if I was any where in the world and needed him, he would be there. It’s comforting to know I have such a friend, even if we don’t speak for months.”

Professional Accomplishments

Several classmates had very significant career accomplishments: Constructing the tallest building in Atlanta; founding and building what turned into a major medical group practice; choosing the right organization that enabled me to develop and apply my scientific interests in several breakthrough areas. Such career accomplishments and the economic security they provided made the top three spots for about half the individuals. They often reflected a pride in creation, including discovering new ways of doing things, generating jobs, and being part of developing others’ careers and character.

Interestingly though, career achievements did not rise to anyone’s #1 spot. And the accumulation of wealth or possessions was not mentioned as a highlight by anyone. As one classmate put it, “the ‘things’ that have given me the most satisfaction in life have been my experiences, not my possessions.”

Experiences – Delightful, Educational, and Humbling

The insights and delights from the experience of traveling to different places ranked in the top three for many. For one

individual the new perspectives learned from leaving his hometown after college was his number one positive life changer – both career wise and personally.

Especially revealing was a specific mid-30’s experience of a successful builder. He described himself at that age as accomplished, self-assured, and full of himself. He was standing in a cafeteria line and engaged in a conversation with a co-worker when someone bumped him from behind. Irritated by the distraction and without looking he brushed the person back. His co-worker interrupted him and quietly pointed out that the person behind him was blind. In fact, there was a whole group of blind students in the restaurant from a school located nearby.

That experience humbled him. Here was a group of unique individuals surrounding him, and he had not seen any of them...even when one person literally bumped into him. He recognized in that moment that his self absorption was undermining his broader life perspective and balance. He intentionally began to re-focus outwardly. He took more account of what was going on around him and of each unique individual that he encountered. This cafeteria line moment changed him for the better and made his life more meaningful and fulfilling.

The Value of Fun Things

A very successful anesthesiologist identified building a tree house for his son and a doll house for his daughter as in his top three. The joy he received was multi-faceted: the sense of satisfaction he derived from the design and hands on construction; the happy memories made with his children in the process and their ongoing smiles as they occupied themselves with these play houses for years.

Fishing actually scored up there for someone other than me. It was not one particular fish or trip, but the smiles from all the fish caught and the environment and experiences that were part of catching them.

For another classmate it was the many motorcycle trips he had taken alone and with friends around the U.S. He said there was a contentment that riding provided him that was very meaningful to his whole life.

Fun things...things that bring a smile to your face are important to your life and should be done often.

Different Routes to Life Fulfillment and Success

On reflecting on her own life, a classmate smiled in talking about the difference in the route she had taken and that of her sister. My friend had graduated in the top of her class in high school, done similarly well in college, became a teacher, married and with her financially successful husband built a loving family of 3 children. Her sister’s grades on the other hand were mediocre in high school. She married and had children while still in her teens, struggled financially to make ends meet for decades, and once her children were raised went back to school. She obtained her degree in education and began teaching in her 50’s. My classmate said her sister and

her sister's husband and family always reflected a strong sense of happiness and fulfillment in their lives...even though the route they followed was very different than her own.

Our happiness, it seems, is determined not just by the experiences that we create or encounter in life, but even more so by what we make of them.

It's Never Too Late

You can choose a new rewarding career, hobby or new life motivator at any age.

One classmate with a poor academic record that hung with the trouble making crowd in high school recreated himself a number of years later pursuing a career in dentistry. As a result he is a very well respected and successful professional today.

Another classmate, a senior partner at one of the country's top law firms, retired and is currently working on her thesis for an advanced degree in history. She plans to pursue an encore career in teaching at the college level...something she had always dreamed of.

Why Not Ask Yourself the Question Now?

It appeared that almost everyone who quickly, but thoughtfully responded to the question, benefitted from answering it. I certainly did. The payback comes from both the positive reflections on your life to this point, as well as the forward-looking wisdom it can provide as you plan for your future.

“What are the three things that have added the most value and happiness to your life?”

After you have answered the question for yourself, explore the question with others – both older and younger. I expect you will find the conversation fun...and meaningful.

Smiles,

Jim Bird, Publisher

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Quotes by Pablo Casals

“The truly important things in life - love, beauty, and one's own uniqueness - are constantly being overlooked.”

“I feel the capacity to care is the thing which gives life its deepest significance.”

“To live is not enough; we must take part.”

“The first thing to do in life is to do with purpose what one purposes to do.”

Pablo Casals (1876 -1973) was regarded as one of the greatest cello players and composers of the twentieth century, an ardent supporter of Spanish democracy, and an active opponent of oppressive governments around the world.

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After determining the three most important things that have added value or happiness to your life to this point, consider how you might want to answer the question 20 years or more from now. Is there something about yourself you want to develop, or potential experiences or opportunities you want to expand on as you create your future life? Knowing what is important to you is the first step in making it so.

Work-Life Balance Lessons

By Brian Shue

The term “work-life balance” takes on a different meaning for every person in the corporate world. To me, a more accurate phrase would be, “work now for a life balance tomorrow.” That's because I currently attend law school three to four nights per week (depending on the semester), work full-time as the SPD purchasing agent for the Miami business unit, and am getting married this month. Though I may not have the best work-life balance right now, I realize that the sacrifices I'm making today will pay off in the future when I am able to merge my interests in construction and the law into my career.

I have wanted to study law since high school. After joining Turner's Miami business unit after graduating from college with a degree in architecture, the company supported my goal of studying law, allowing me to attend evening classes for the past three years. As a result of juggling work and school, I don't have much free time. I have sacrificed some activities that I love, including swimming. I was a competitive swimmer since the age of 4, competing through college, with two Florida state championships to my credit. Although I don't still compete, the goal-setting I learned during my swimming career has contributed a great deal to my ability to manage working full-time while attending graduate school. I have applied my experiences in the pool, on the construction site, and in the classroom to the following key lessons:

Learn as much as possible about the current job. We rotate through jobs at Turner to help us become well-rounded and knowledgeable employees. Instead of learning just enough to do my current job function, I strive to learn as much as I can now so I can be more efficient in the future. Since all positions within the business unit are interrelated, the knowledge gained in one area of the business can be applied to different areas, allowing me to save time and improve my work-life balance.

Have a schedule, and prioritize tasks. I start each week with a written list of what I need to accomplish, but I continually reprioritize the tasks based on what gets added and completed as the week progresses. This is especially important in my role as purchasing agent, where priorities and needs are always changing.

Look for the optimal time for certain tasks. I write contracts early in the morning and at lunchtime when I am less likely to be interrupted. It is the best way I've found to make sure the contracts get completed properly.

Make time to recharge. While I don't swim anymore, I do make it a priority to run at least 30 minutes a day – sometimes even between classes. Exercising helps clear my head and manage stress. When I come home from school at the end of the night, I take time to unwind before bed.

Keep your eye on the prize. There will always be priorities to juggle, whether they are academic, professional, or family. I remind myself that today's hard work will contribute to tomorrow's lifestyle.

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