

# PUBLICATION

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## Make Joy a Plan

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**The quest for joy, it's a tricky one. The journey to joy is filled with mirages, things that look like they will bring joy until we reach them, and then the image evaporates. Many unhappy professionals spend a lifetime with joy just beyond their reach. I don't have the answers, but I've spent 20 years thinking about the right questions to ask. Asking the right questions helps us to create a detailed roadmap to the destinations that bring us joy. Think of that map as your Joy Plan. I suggest that you consider ten things when making your Joy Plan.**

### 1. Be intentional in determining what brings you joy.

Yogi Berra said, "If you don't know where you are going, you will probably end up someplace else." Start your renewed quest for joy by creating a Goals List, a list of 100 things that are likely to bring you joy. My friend and career coach, Cordell Parvin, taught me 15 years ago to divide my list into four categories: physical (example – sleep eight hours each night); financial (example – save enough to buy a beach house); spiritual/relationships (example – have a daily devotional); and professional (example – build the best Women's Initiative in the country). Commit the time and honesty it takes to get this right. Then gut check it with a few people who know you well. Have them ask you hard questions about it. When you feel settled on your Goals List, start the satisfying work of filling it with checkmarks – bask in the joy of reaching a beautiful place that does not evaporate just before you arrive. This step is the intentionality on which the rest of your Joy Plan hinges.

### 2. Find joy in hard work and a job well done.

On our quests for joy, we often find we are exhausted, physically and emotionally. Embrace that, it's okay. Temper your periods of exhaustion with periods of rest and rejuvenation. Perspective is really important here. I find perspective by tracing up my family tree and seeing how my parents and grandparents labored to earn their livings. They worked in a shoe factory, opened a flea market, worked on another man's farm, gave traffic tickets, taught science to middle schoolers, and fought in wars. They worked as hard or harder than I do and found their rewards in providing for their families, really enjoying their co-workers, and in a job well done. My dad played in a softball league with his fellow policemen. My mom played volleyball with her fellow teachers. My grandfather formed a band with his fellow soldiers in the navy where he played harmonica and sang. My parents put in way more hours than their government jobs required because they found joy in a job well done. One of the greatest gifts we can give our children is to model for them the love and celebration of hard work.

### 3. Stop thinking that your passions must be your profession.

It is perfectly fine for our profession not to be our greatest passion. We can spend our lives wishing we had pursued music, or we can start a band at the office or volunteer to work with a children's choir. We can spend our lives wishing we had been a coach, or we can volunteer to coach our kids' sports teams. We can spend our lives wishing we had opened a little restaurant with a rotating menu, or we can find the joy in preparing lovely meals for our friends and family. And, consider that if your passion was your profession, that might be a joy mirage. I've talked with those whose professions are their life's greatest passion (ministers and artists, for example) and some have expressed to me that the requirement that they provide for their families through the

business side of their passion lessens the joy they find in it. Whether our profession is or is not something that stirs wild passion in us should be no obstacle to our ability to experience full joy.

#### **4. Look at your life through the lens of a lifetime and not a day.**

Really meaningful, joy-filled lives are filled with stressful, long days. Don't measure your joy with a short stick. As you retrace your steps to the things that brought you the most joy, do you find a lot of missteps and pain? Let's take raising children for example. How many parents launch a child into adulthood and conclude – that parenting thing was so easy, we nailed that, no problems at all? On the flip side, how many parents after raising a child think back to the long days, the failures along the way and conclude – wow, I made a ton of mistakes, I was tired a lot, and my kid was not perfect, yet that was one of my life's most satisfying journeys? We can apply that same sort of perspective to the other things that are important enough to make our Goals List. It widens the lens through which we look for joy.

#### **5. Take a long look at your failure, learn from it, then flush it.**

Failures are essential to growth and deep joy. When we set huge goals, we are choosing to take a calculated risk that may result in us falling short. When we fail, it's important to reconstruct what went wrong and how we can do better the next time. Once you have found your lesson learned, you must let – it – go. My son is a pitcher. I would like to apologize publicly to anyone who sat next to me on the bleachers when he was pitching, for the things I said to the umpires who called balls on the corner of the plate. When a batter gets on base, if the pitcher continues to focus on that last batter, the next batter will also get on base, and what could have been an isolated failure turns into a loss. My son's coach taught him that after each batter, you have to "flush it". We must flush our mistakes. Almost every mistake is both fixable and a learning opportunity, unless we dwell on them. Then those failures become real joy-robbers.

#### **6. Celebrate the mundane and the chaos.**

Most of life is routine, and therein lies a lot of joy to be spotted. It takes practice to become an expert joy-spotter. I find it fascinating to sit next to a seasoned expert at an event where I am not an expert and watch as they point out things that I missed. Spotting an unintentional face mask 80 yards away. Catching a glimpse of the slight white of a deer tail in the woods 100 yards away. Tracking a 300-yard drive and knowing that the ball landed just short of the green on the left. It's baffling to me. My eyes are not trained by practice to spot what the expert can see. A seasoned joy-spotter sees the opportunities to celebrate that which others may miss. We keep champagne flutes in my office. We celebrate the small victories because it brings us joy. Sometimes when we are in the middle of chaos with more to get done than we think we can do, we turn up the music, plot our victory, and work our tails off not to let each other or our clients down. Then, we celebrate our wins as a team and we bear each other's losses. If you practice being a joy-spotter, you will find points to celebrate all along the journey and that brings joy.

#### **7. Invest big for big payoff.**

Big joy takes big investment. I suggest you consider two things in deciding whether your proposed investment is 'big' enough to yield the joy payoff you want. First, consider the size of the personal investment you are making. For example, if you want to add a beach house to your Goals List, you are going to need to work really hard. If you want to be in a position to retire at 50, you are going to have to set aside money at 25 that you would like to spend on a new car. Next, consider the size of what you are investing in. I have found that investing in something bigger than myself has a multiplier effect on joy. Let's start with investments in personal relationships, that is investing in both yourself and someone else. That can double your joy payoff. Investing in the team you work with can multiply your joy. Investing time in your spiritual growth, can bring joy larger than

we may comprehend in our lifetime. Investing in causes that are important to you and seeing the lives of others improved equates to compound interest, the eighth wonder of the world. A cautionary note here – there are seasons for everything. Parents with children who have not reached adulthood are often overwhelmed, exhausted, and burdened by guilt that they are not contributing significant time to charitable causes like they did before they were parents. If you are raising children, the heavy load on that will likely last about a quarter of your lifetime. And, make no mistake that raising kind, charitable children who will make this world a better place is a charitable cause to which you are contributing. Find charitable acts to do with your children and give others the opportunity to carry the load on heavy charitable work for a little while. You can still give financially, you can still do charitable activities with your children, and when you have more available resources, you will adjust your Goals List.

#### **8. Say 'yes' a lot and say 'no' even more.**

True joy is like gardening, you must prune some attractive things so that the maximum nutrients will reach the most beautiful things. A gardener will tell you that clipping a perfectly fine branch and watching it fall to the ground is hard. It takes practice. Yet, it must be done for the plant to thrive. There is a finite amount of nutrients that one plant can absorb. The only way to direct the maximum amount to the most desirable destinations is to eliminate the need for the nutrients to go anywhere else. Each of us has the exact same amount of time to invest in what matters to us. We have relatively the same amount of energy to devote, although those who practice self-care have more. So, an authentic Joy Plan must take that into account. Saying 'no' is pruning, and sometimes that means saying 'no' to attractive things. In having the courage to do that, our maximum energy reaches the things we have determined to be the most beautiful in our lives. There is magnificent joy to be found on the other side of that intentional decision making. If you feel guilt while pruning, that is misplaced. Saying 'yes' to things not on your Goals List equates to depriving the things on your Goals List of the resources they need to thrive.

#### **9. Be a rock in the relationships that matter.**

I suspect that when you complete your Joy Plan, relationships with those who matter most will be a critical component. Relationships take huge time and emotional investments. I have found immense satisfaction in knowing that those I care for turn to me in a crisis, and they know that I will be there. When I have tried to be everything to everyone, that joy has eluded me. This varies for introverts, extroverts and the myriad of personality classifications we can learn about ourselves. But, one thing remains constant: we need to show up for important relationships to feel content. For those of us with children, we must define for ourselves what being a good parent means to us, but I'm fairly certain of two things. First, you will want your children to know that they can count on you in a crisis. And, for the second point I will ask you to consider two questions and let you reach your own conclusion. Do you want your parents' entire world to revolve around you? Do you want your parents to be joyful in their life's passions? Your kids feel the same way.

#### **10. Get a Joy Plan accountability partner.**

When you are looking for your Joy Plan accountability partner, you are looking for someone: who knows you well, who can give honest and hard feedback, and whose judgment you trust. It's ideal when you can each serve the role for one another. Share your draft Joy Plans with each other and then schedule routine times to challenge each other on whether the plan is solidly drafted and on relentless execution. Joy Plans are thrilling to draft, exciting to share, and hard work to execute. Your Joy Plan's success can turn on the quality of your accountability partner.

As you embark on your Joy Plan, I would love to hear about it because for me your success is the return on the investment with compound interest from my own Joy Plan. I will break out my office champagne flutes and we can raise a toast when you reach those beautiful places that bring you joy.