

Community Leadership

A partnership between community organizations and Libraries, Community and Voluntary Services Branch (LCVS), Municipal Affairs and Housing and the Wild Rose Foundation, Tourism, Parks, Recreation and Culture

Dec 2007

Volume 1, Issue 4

Waking Up to a Meaningful Life by Chris Hsiung

"I was hanging out in Nepal doing this hike. I saw this one kid over a few days who was wearing this paper-thin t-shirt. Every day he wore this same t-shirt. My first instinct was to think, 'Oh poor kid... he only has one t-shirt.' I quickly realized that he was one of the lucky kids in the village. He was the only one who had a t-shirt!"

"I came home to my life. I looked in my closet and there were quite literally ten lifetimes of clothes. These people were using their clothes to their functional end. Here I was changing styles every year. I was disgusted with myself."

Jay Baydala was a successful IT project manager for large-scale software development. After thirteen years of what he knew deep down was not meaningful work, he left the industry and sold most of his worldly belongings including half of his clothes (he's working on the rest).

That was four years ago. Today marks the opening of his dream... **ChristmasFuture** (<http://www.christmasfuture.org>), an organization dedicated to eradicating extreme poverty by redirecting a percentage of consumer spending.

I interviewed Jay to learn about his journey so that I could (perhaps selfishly) extract some of his wisdom for myself. He'd be the first to say that he's still learning, still "figuring it out", and that every person must find his/her own path. But regardless of the path, I think pioneers have many common qualities.

Here are parts of that interview and my irreverent and real take on the lessons I learned.

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Peace cannot be kept by force.
It can only be achieved by
understanding.

Albert Einstein
(1979-1955)

Waking Up to a Meaningful Life (continued from page 1)

What led you to leave your job?

There wasn't one moment. I enjoyed IT project management. I enjoyed working with a team. I enjoyed making things better. However, along that journey, I also realized that it wasn't enough for me that the company saved "x" millions of dollars.

I got to a point where I had to move away from this. In reality, I did not know what I was moving towards. But the moving away clarified what I was moving towards. You had to have a faith that this [job] wasn't it.

[The "Letting Go" Lesson: Sometimes the problem is that the job, the relationship, or the situation takes up so much space that it crowds out all other possibilities. Only when you leave it behind do you invite the answers into your life. Be prepared still! AND also have faith that you have the ability to figure it out.]

How would you describe the birth of ChristmasFuture?

I realized that I didn't want to live in a world where someone starved to death for no good reason because they didn't get 20 cent medicine. It wasn't right. The more I saw how much I actually had in my life compared to what I saw in the developing world... the more I wanted to engage in this issue.

[The Compassion Lesson: True compassion is not just about feeling sorry or pity for someone's suffering. It's about feeling the suffering of the other and doing something about it.]

How did you come up with ChristmasFuture?

I wanted some way to engage in changing the world. So, I looked for something I wanted, and it didn't exist. That's part of my business training. When you're looking for something and it doesn't exist, there is probably someone else looking for it... which means opportunity.

This is something that I can do. I have the skills. I have the connections. I can make it happen... accompanied with some faith.

[The "it's never too late" lesson: Just because you leave your previous job behind doesn't mean that you leave behind your abilities or your experiences. Not everything you've learned up until now is throwaway.]

What gets you through the tough times in building ChristmasFuture?

The thirteen years of not living a meaningful life. Thirteen years of learning that other way and now feeling this and experiencing this. This is a far better way to live!

This has made every choice very easy. I'm not "trying" to want to or "wanting" to want to. I want to. I want to sell my big SUV that is polluting the atmosphere and costing me hundreds of dollars. I want to sell my house that fills up with things I don't need. It's clear. It hasn't been a struggle.

[The "Surviving Through Tough Times" Lesson: When you are on purpose with what you want to do, it becomes easier to do what needs to be done, learn from the challenges, and change your behaviour.]



To read the rest of this interview, visit <http://coach.humanventure.org/Articles/Articles.html> and click on "Waking Up to a Meaningful Life". Looking for a meaningful gift to give to someone? Go to ChristmasFuture at <http://www.christmasfuture.org>.

"The time is always right to do right"

Martin Luther King,

Jr.

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World Wide Nonprofit Organizations' Convergence

Convergence: 1: the act of moving toward one point, union or uniformity; 2: independent development of similar characters; 3: the merging of distinct technologies, industries, or devices into a unified whole.

(Merriam-Webster)



Paul Hawken is an entrepreneur, environmentalist, educator and best-selling author. His writings and work have caused CEOs like Ray Anderson of Interface Carpets to transform their corporations' culture, policies and practices in favour of environmental

restoration. His most recent book, "Blessed Unrest" explores a world wide movement that is striving for human and life wellbeing.

Hawken has traveled extensively throughout the world giving talks about the environment and after every speech, is approached by people who gather around to talk, ask questions and give him their business cards. The people who offered their cards were working on the most prominent issues of day: global warming, poverty, peace, conservation, human rights - efforts to safeguard nature and ensure justice. They were from the nonprofit organization world, also known as civil society.

Over the years, he noticed the cards were adding up into the thousands and at first, as a matter of curiosity and then as a hunch that something larger was afoot, he began to explore how many groups were part of this significant social movement that was under the radar of the mainstream culture. He estimated through his research that there was one to two million organizations working towards ecological sustainability and social justice.

"By conventional definition, this is not a movement. Movements have leaders and ideologies. You *join* movements, study tracts, and identify yourself with a group.

You read the biography of the founder or listen to them perorate on tape or in person," Hawken notes. He has come to the conclusion that this is "the largest social movement in all of history, no one knows its scope, and how it functions is more mysterious than meets the eye."

"What does meet the eye is compelling: tens of millions of ordinary and not so ordinary people willing to confront despair, power and incalculable odds in order to restore some semblance of grace, justice and beauty in this world."

The movement grows in an organic way and is composed of individuals, families and groups that may never know of each other. It can't be divided because it is made up of small pieces – loosely joined. Many dismiss it as powerless but it has been known to bring down governments, companies, and leaders through its efforts to inform and gather.

"In a world grown too complex for constrictive ideologies, the very word movement may be too small, for it is the largest coming together of citizens in history. This is the first time in history that a large social movement is not bound together by an "ism". This unnamed movement's big contribution is the absence of one big idea; in its stead it offers thousands of practical and useful ideas. In place of "isms" are processes, concerns and compassion. The movement is peaceful, yet does not agree on everything nor will it ever, because that would make it an ideology," Hawken says. This convergence of ideas and effort is what Hawken calls a "blessed unrest".

Source: "Blessed Unrest" by Paul Hawken

If you would like to watch the video:
www.blessedunrest.com/video.html

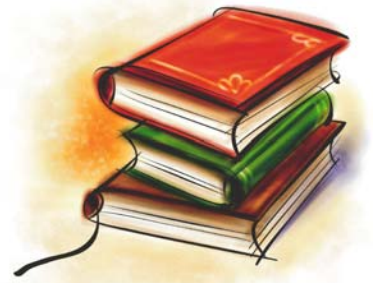
"I was brought up to believe that the only thing worth doing was to add to the sum of accurate information in the world."

Margaret Mead

Books worth reading...

The Logic of Failure: Recognizing and Avoiding Error in Complex Situations

by Dietrich Dörner



A community has a problem. The volume of traffic downtown, the resultant noise and air pollution have become intolerable, so, Council reduced the speed limit to 20 kms per hour and put in concrete speed bumps to prevent cars from exceeding it. But the results were not what they had expected: lower speed limits forced cars to travel in second gear so they were noisier and produced more exhaust, and shopping trips that took 20 minutes now took thirty. The number of cars downtown in any given time actually increased, and shopping downtown became so nerve-wracking, fewer and fewer people went there. Businesses were losing customers to outlying malls and tax revenues sank. This is just one example of how seemingly good decisions can go wrong.

Dörner explores how problems can be created when what appears to be a simple solution fails to consider the possible side effects and long-term repercussions of a decision, if we apply corrective measures too aggressively or too timidly, or if we ignore premises we should have considered. Through the use of computer-simulated planning games, he examines the failings of human thought and action in complex situations. He walks the reader through a fictitious community in England—Greenvale and also a region in Africa, as well as drawing on real events in our past to examine what factors and behaviours contribute to good decision-making.

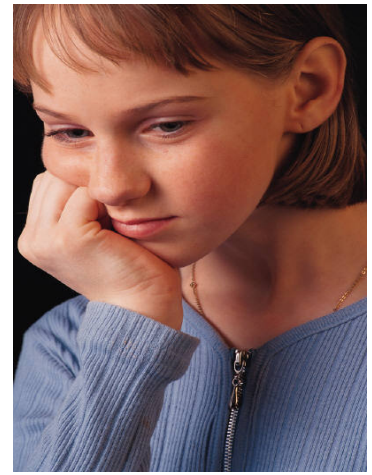
After comparing the thought patterns of the people acting as mayors who did well in the Greenvale experiment, it showed:

- good participants, as mayors, made more decisions that the poor ones (they found more possibilities for influencing outcomes);
- good ones kept the aspect of complex systems in mind and considered not just the primary goal of any given measure, but also its potential effects on other sectors of the system;
- good ones pursued the same goal with multiple measures;
- less successful participants as mayors devoted most of their decision-making to problems that could be solved easily versus the real issues;
- both were even in the number of hypotheses formed about the community, but good participants tested their hypotheses more often, while the bad ones felt it unnecessary to test their hypotheses and instead of generating hypotheses, they generated “truths”;
- good participants asked more “why” questions (as opposed to “what” questions), were more interested in the causal links behind events while the bad ones took events at face value and regarded them as unconnected;
- good participants dug deeper into their analysis while the bad ones changed the subject under discussion far more often, leaping from one subject to another (had difficulty solving a given problem, so they would drop it);
- good ones demonstrated persistence and stuck with a problem;
- bad participants had a single-minded preoccupation with one project to the exclusion of all else; good participants focused their energy on the right fields of endeavour; and
- in terms of self-organization and conduct, good mayors often reflected on their own behaviour, commented critically on it and made efforts to modify it while bad participants were inclined to blame others or shift the responsibility.

How we Learn...or not!

“We live in a world of self-generating beliefs which remain largely untested. We adopt those beliefs because they are based on conclusions, which are inferred from what we observe, plus our past experience.” Rick Ross in “The Fifth Discipline Handbook” suggests that our ability to test those beliefs is eroded by our feelings that:

- our beliefs are the truth;
- the truth is obvious;
- our beliefs are based on real data; and
- the data we select are the real data.



These four feelings prevent disciplined reflection. Without disciplined reflection, there is no learning or improvement in the quality of our thinking or action, just a reinforcement of the *status quo*. We can, however, be deliberate about how and what we think. Consider the following approaches taken from the work of Ken Low of the Action Studies Institute.

- Become more aware of your own thinking and reasoning.
- Explore the reasons you have certain biases and find ways to test your assumptions.
- Strive to find the most accurate description of a situation before passing judgment (seek out many different perspectives to find the best representation of truth).
- Understand how self-justification limits your ability to accept information that conflicts with your worldview.
- Be aware of the fallibility of your thinking—where you are exhibiting blind trust.
- Broaden your scope of interests and responsibilities, as well as striving for deeper understanding to build your thinking capacity and ability to adapt.
- Recognize your conduct is a reflection of the quality of your thinking—take personal responsibility for improving your actions by improving the capacity of your thinking.

Thinking of “Peace on Earth” this time of year...

We have had many great leaders in our past encourage us to live in peace. They have tried to tell us that we need to continue to strive for peaceful co-existence, demonstrating caring and compassion for our fellow human beings.

Why is this so difficult? One reason could be that we fall prey to our bio-social drivers

—our evolutionary wiring. This level of basic functioning does have its benefits. We are wired for survival and we tend to function in certain ways that contribute to self preservation and perpetuation. It also supports group bonding.



This level of human nature also has its downfalls. When behaviours such as excessive status seeking, dominance and aggression overwhelm our ability to reason, it can have negative consequences on our collective wellbeing.

When we predominately function at this basic level of thinking, caring and acting, we do all we can to protect the group we have bonded with, the “in group” and see all others as the “out group”.

Striving for peace requires understanding, controlling, refining and aligning lower level capacities with higher level thinking. It also requires us to align with the idea that above all else, we belong to two communities—the community of humanity and the community of life.

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From the Editor...

Do you have a story from your community or organization you would like to share?

If so, please give me a call or email me—I would love to hear from you...



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Learning from History...

I was recently talking with a colleague, Debbie Berg, who happened to mention a video she had recently watched hosted by James Burke, scientific historian and educator. So, I popped onto “YouTube” and took a look at it. Burke begins with a story.

“Somebody once went up to a great philosopher and said, “What a lot of morons people back in the middle ages must have been to have looked every morning at the dawn and to have thought that what they were seeing was the sun going around the earth. Well, as every school child knows, the earth goes around the sun, and it doesn’t take too many brains to understand that!” To which the philosopher replied, “Yes, but I wonder what it would have looked like if the sun did go around the earth?” It would, of course, have looked the same.

Burke goes on to say that what you think the universe is, and how you react to that in everything you do, depends on what you know. And when that knowledge changes, for you, the universe changes. And that is as true for the whole society as for the individual. We are all what we know today.

Burke’s five-part series examines how we are products of our thinking and knowledge and how this knowledge creates what we believe to be the truth.

Interested? Go onto YouTube and search using key words “The Day the Universe Changed” or “James Burke” or checkout his website on “The Knowledge Web” at <http://k-web.org/>



In the Next Issue:

- Books Worth Reading
- Adult Learning

“It is the experience of touching the pain of others that is the key to change...compassion is a sign of transformation”^{to}

Jim Wallis (1948 -)