MOTIVATION | PERSONAL GROWTH | WISDOM

Saving and Savoring the world

Ultimately, each of us must, in our way, offer our unique teaching of the larger truths that embrace us all.

by **Richard Leider**

1697 words | 6 pages

> *"I arise in the morning torn between a desire to improve (or save) the world and a desire to enjoy (or savor) the world. This makes it hard to plan the day."*
> -E. B. White

How many truly happy people do you know? If you can tick off your answers on only one hand, consider a second question: Why are so few people truly happy?

One reason is lack of purpose. Purpose is essential to deep joy. When we lose our reason to get up in the morning, we start dying. Much of today's dissatisfaction stems from failing to discover new ways to both save and savor the world. When purpose dies, vitality dies, And, even if no one else notices the deadness on our souls, we notice.

Most of us have keen awareness of purpose when it is present in others and ourselves, and we have an uneasy feeling of "inner kill" - deadness - when it is absent.

Living on purpose means both saving and savoring the world.

Both are essential to vitality. Do you have a reason to get up in the morning? Do you, while savoring your life, have a reason larger than yourself for living? Purpose has many meanings, but one is the essential link between the word *saving* and the word *savoring.*

THE ULTIMATE TEST FOR HAPPINESS

Purpose is the driving force behind the motive to get up in the morning. The ultimate test for happiness is this: "Can you look back at your life and

feel peace of mind from the reality that you have lived a purposeful life?" Can you regard your present state, no matter how limited by financial means or health, as one of living on purpose?

Purpose is what concerns us the most; what we care about; what gets us moving.

> ***Purpose is the anchor that secures us to life, which anchors us during crisis, which keeps us going when nothing else does.***

It fits things together. It gives meaning in times of uncertainty or loss.

INFORMATION, KNOWLEDGE... AND WISDOM

Before the days of books, computers and the internet, *wisdom* - where the best hunting was, what berries and plants were good to eat, when it was time to move camp and when not - was held by elders, those who had lived long enough to experience and impart an understanding of the essentials. The job of the elder was to teach the essentials and the universals to the younger generation. This was the elder's purpose.

Today, the common store of information and knowledge is more complex and more accessible. No longer is information and knowledge the exclusive purview of elders. The accessibility of information and knowledge through the Internet is now much more the domain of the young, the masters of the new cybernetic world. Indeed, in the last half century, there has been a revolution in the acquisition and transmission of information and knowledge.

Wisdom, however, is another matter. Wisdom's domain lies in another direction. Wisdom is not exclusively about information and knowledge, but about *context*, and in this arena the young must often still defer to the old. Why? Because when it comes to the essentials of living, it is clear we haven't made as much progress since ancient times. Wisdom moves slowly because it takes a lifetime to acquire and there are no shortcuts. In fact, it is the paradox of wisdom that the faster we try to master it, the slower it comes to us; the very act of accelerated living inhibits the intuitive quality of *ripening* our wisdom.

Wisdom mostly remains the domain of the elders among us, and the technology revolution has not diminished our need for them; it has accelerated it. It has created a need for generative elders.

BECOMING A GENELDER

In an article in *Newsweek* magazine, evangelist Billy Graham remarked, "All my life I've been taught how to die, but no one ever taught me how to grow old." What a remarkable insight from a wise elder and mentor to countless presidents and world leaders.

A critical lesson about purpose is that the emergence, the *generative* quality, of what is uniquely *our* life purpose is a core concern throughout our lives. There are many other core concerns, but this one must never be out of sight, particularly as we learn *how to grow old.*

What truly matters in life according to Viktor Frankl, Nazi concentration camp survivor and author of the classic book, *Man's Search for Meaning*, is not the meaning of life in general, but rather the specific meaning of a person's life at a given moment. "One should not search for an abstract meaning of life," Frankl advises, "Everyone has his own specific vocation or mission in life to carry out a concrete assignment which demands fulfillment."

Generative elders perform many "concrete assignments" in the world as guides, models and mentors. But the most common assignment, ancient or modern, is to teach. The core assignment, today, remains the same: to pass on what we know to others. That said, not every elder is a teacher. To be both old and wise is a gift. The gifted elders are the GenELDERS - the ones about whom we can later say these magic four words: "There was this teacher…" We recall their generosity and the way they inspired us to live our own lives.

I recently had an encounter with one of these GenELDERS. Kampala, the oldest, and arguably the wisest of the Hadza hunter-gatherers living in the bush in northern Tanzania, is pegged by his peers at somewhere between age 94 and 98. He has outlived the average Hadza life expectancy by double. Yet, his age didn't seem that special to him although he admitted to being surprised at times he was "still here". I felt both his qualities of saving and savoring the world as he shared the creation story of "how the Hadza came to be" with a group of both Hadza and western visitors. It was an animated roller-coaster ride through the history of the Hadza. Kampala was a GenELDER - magical, generous,

funny and wise. I felt like we were his tribe and he wanted to share everything he could with us while he was with us.

Clearly, Kampala was sharing something more than the Hadza creation story. Kampala's gift had something to do with savoring and saving the world. And beneath all that there was his way of being in the world - his sense of generosity. In the way his face lit up as he told stories. I saw that GenELDERing was not a philosophical or spiritual abstraction.

> ***I observed the deep wisdom in his hands, which were gnarled and veined from the century of living in the bush.***

He was not teaching us, he was showing us, embodying the wisdom of his years. This embodiment, in its wholeness, was his tribal role. He was an archetypal *wise elder*. But, there was something of the muse in him also. He was both *saving and savoring* his world.

LIVING IN LIMBO

To grow old is biological destiny. But to be a GenELDER implies something more, an inner knowing that transcends aging. The GenELDER is a person who knows about things that matter and at the same time knows how to savor the world. For Kampala, I observe that the final purpose of his life is to die happy by teaching generously.

Not every elder knows how to transform his or her raw experience into this kind of wisdom. Not every elder can teach like Kampala. In the elder's role there is a range of capacity and gifts. All the more reason why those who are able to teach - GenELDERS - are so important today. They have a critical role to play in the transmission of universal stories, core values, and moral legacies. Their purpose, should good health allow them to exercise it, is to *save and savor* the world, so that the larger spiritual narrative of life can advance. Ultimately, each of us must, in our own way, offer our unique teaching of the larger truths that embrace us all.

In *Wishful Thinking: A Seeker's ABC*, Frederick Buechner offers this: True joy comes from "the place where your deep gladness and the world's deep hunger meet."

Many people live in between the gladness and the hunger, neither savoring nor saving the world. They are not so unhappy with their current lives that they can't live with themselves. Neither are they so happy with their lives that they have no incentive to break free. They live in *limbo* - in the neutral zone between saving and savoring - committing to neither. Eventually, they might feel a growing sense of purpose, a feeling that there might be a greater mission or larger calling. Becoming a GenELDER becomes a larger narrative. Are you saving the world? Savoring the world? Both?

Richard Leider, ranked by Forbes as one of the "Top 5" most respected coaches in America, is a bestselling author with over thirty years experience in coaching people to live and work on purpose. Founder and Chairman of *The Inventure Group*, he is the author of seven books, including three best-sellers, and his work has been translated into 17 languages. A pioneer in the field of coaching, Richard's work received recognition from the Bush Foundation, from which he was awarded a Bush Fellowship to study "the power of purpose." Believing passionately that each of us is born with a purpose, he is dedicated to helping people to live on purpose.

If you are interested in learning more about becoming a GenELDER, please check out our brand new *GenElder Guide*. The guide includes a process to help you answer many questions associated with vital aging. We also have a *GenElder Discussion Guide*, which is helpful for those wanting to lead a "fireside chat". Both guides can be purchased separately or together in a package deal. Please visit www.inventuregroup.com for more information and to order the guides. Questions can be directed to Elizabeth Harrington HERE